

[Transcript] Between Two Beers Podcast / Guyon Espiner: Mastering the art of the interview

On this episode of Between Two Beers, we talk to Guy in Espina.

Guy in is one of New Zealand's most highly respected journalists and has worked in print, radio and television for more than 20 years as a reporter, political editor and anchor.

He is reported on trade from China, on war from Afghanistan, on politics from Washington and on climate change from Antarctica.

He currently works at Radio New Zealand as an investigative journalist and has just released his new book The Drinking Game which looks at how big business the media and politicians shape the way we drink.

In this episode we talk about Guy on's friendship and rivalry with Duncan Garner, what life is really like in the parliamentary press gallery, why he crossed the floor from TVNZ to TV3, the art of interviewing politicians, his best Winston Peters drinking story and their most memorable interview, and his new book and why he turned away from the booze. This was a cracking at, Guy in is sharp, worldly and insightful and his experiences and stories from two decades in New Zealand journalism would rival anyone in the country.

You will love this one.

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A huge thanks to those supporting the show on Patreon for the cost of a cup of coffee a month to get involved head to www.between2beers.com and while you're there sign up to our new weekly newsletter which has behind the scenes recap of each episode.

This episode was brought to you from the Export Beer Garden studio, enjoy.

Guy Nespina, welcome to Between Two Beers.

Thanks very much for having me, it's good to be here.

I'd like to address the elephant in the room to start off with I guess a podcast called Between Two Beers and I've got two gentlemen beside me who I'm sure are going to tell me about how they've found a better life without booze.

Yeah well I've got three beers in front of me and a glass of water but I think I know which one I'll be reaching for.

Likewise, likewise.

It depends how the interview goes I suppose isn't it?

Yeah, it's an interesting dynamic but we're going to get into all that but the book's out, new book out today.

That's right, The Drinking Game is out and it's my first real book.

So yeah I'm pretty proud of it so I don't know these things exist in your head and then your computer files for a long time and then there's this weird feeling that oh my god other people are going to read it.

But yeah so it's a mix of some nervousness but excitement too.

But a delayed gratification I imagine with a book, you do a good interview, you're hearing about it straight away with a book, you might not get feedback for six months down the line when people get around to reading it right?

Yeah that's right, it is a delayed gratification thing.

And I spent 30 years in journalism and every year I've wanted to do something new.

And so I've done newspapers and I spent 10 years in television, it's coming up 10 years on radio.

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I'd never done a book before and I wanted to do one so yeah it was partly about having a new challenge.

Yeah we are going to get into the no drinking thing a little bit later in the episode but just briefly off the top, how has it changed your life?

Well massively actually it's been a huge change, yeah I mean drinking like a lot of people, drinking for me was something that went with all occasions you know, births, deaths, marriages, get a new job, lose a job, every occasion, celebrations, commiserations was with alcohol, you know meeting a girl for the first time, being a teenager, bonding with friends, you know all that was with alcohol.

I was my partner in crime every step of the way so to give that up after about 35 years or not quite that long but say 14 or 15 to about 47, whatever the maths is on that, you know I would have been drunk every weekend and that's not that unusual for a Kiwi guy who's a Gene Xer born in 1970, that's a pretty ordinary kind of story.

I think the surprising thing for me was how easy it was to give the substance up and how hard the social expectations side was, it was quite weird to just you know divorce myself from alcohol relatively easily, yet the expectations, the weight of expectations from others was really great and that was part of the reason and part of the message that I wanted to write this book to examine why that is and examine some of the challenges that we face when we make a decision that we're not drinkers.

It's an interesting one, I've just come back from a wedding in Brisbane and first time to see a group of friends that I haven't seen since I made this decision, they were aware of it and same thing, it's sort of like you're met with oh good for you, I'm glad that's going well and then inevitably after a few beers from other people it's that the questions start around why, you know why, what is it about that, what is it and there's a curiosity around it as well, I think there's, societally there's, I don't know if that's a word, there is, it's becoming more and more acceptable is probably the wrong way to do it, but it's a choice and it's an option that people have and there was at the end of the night someone who was on that sober driver buzz that then thought oh I'd like to have a couple of drinks and I just said yeah that's fine, just hand me the keys to the truck and I can drive you and straight away ripped into it, it's becoming more and more of a conversation I feel in those social settings.

Yeah, I think they've got a phrase for it, haven't they, sober curious, you hear that phrase a bit, yeah and I think there is a bit of that, it just amazed me that I did all sorts of stupid things and some of these tales are in the book, everything from embarrassing myself in front of the greatest living New Zealanders in Antarctica to sending me a hand on fire in a pub, no one ever said to me once, hey why are you drinking so much, not once, but when I stopped drinking they were like why aren't you drinking and I just thought this is kind of crazy like this is this reverse burden of proof on it and part of it I think is people projecting and you can kind of see the fear in their eyes when you say to them oh I'm not only just not drinking tonight, I'm not drinking ever and kind of like I think they're thinking how would I go with that or are you making a comment on what I'm doing and I guess that's the difficulty that I had, it's like I don't care what you're drinking mate, you know if we're having a good court at all and having a good time then

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that's cool, why are you so interested in what's in my glass, like it's kind of weird how you get this sort of cone of silence or this big unity in drinking right, that somehow you're letting the side down or you're a spy who's been sent in to infiltrate and report back if you're the one who's not not drinking.

It's kind of a weird ass scenario and you do need people listening who are thinking about doing this or in their early stages of it, you need some strategies aye, I mean lying's good if you can say oh I'm pregnant or I'm training for an endurance marathon, I mean it's one of those excuses would work for me but the other probably wouldn't. Yeah I'm the same, actually no both of those, but both of those don't work for me at all. You kind of need a strategy, especially for me the hardest bit was when you walk into the gig right, when you walk into someone's house or the party or the host is usually really keen to give you a drink and it comes from a good place you know because this is our culture really and you kind of need your yarn sorted out or your strategy sorted out to a degree.

It gets easier as you go along, I'm nearly four years into it and I don't give a shit now, I'm sweet with any of that but yeah there's some pretty rough moments early on like the couple of gigs I packed early on were pretty tough.

Yeah it's interesting with like I said a podcast called Between Two Beers, even the culture has changed in the three and a half years, we've been doing it, the amount of conversations we've had similar to this.

But I am going to build us back into this because I kind of want to paint the picture of you to show what an important part alcohol, I'm not sure what an important's the right word, what a big part alcohol played in your life.

But to get there there's so much depth and we often talk about how tight or loose a guest circle is and that's measured by how many interesting yarns your friends and colleagues share about you and you have what we'd describe as a loose circle.

So we've got many interesting bits to unpick and we want to start with Cricket.

We've heard you were a very good age group cricketer who once captained Chris Cairns. Is this accurate?

Well it is accurate, it was the under 16 Canterbury team and it's probably a bit more revealing to say that he was also in the under 18 team at the same time.

I mean he was a man and I was a boy, I mean I still remember, he came up from a targo when we were sort of 13, 14 and he was already bowling, God knows how fast, so he's an extraordinary cricketer.

But yeah I was nuts on cricket and a Mad King cricketer back in my Christchurch days and played with a few guys who went on to do pretty well.

I played with Stephen Fleming, he's a bit younger, a few years younger than me but in the Sydenham teams and it cashed me a high school and there's a couple of others.

Chris Harris was one of the other ones kicking around.

Not quite so intimidating as Chris Cairns I imagine.

No, no, no it's good all rounder though.

But yeah so you know that's true but that was about, I peaked about there, okay.

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There's a few of us that did that, yeah those under 16, those age group years and that was the highlight of your kind of life, sporting wise.

Died out on the story a few times too to be honest.

Have you given up, have you retired?

No I have, I retired hurt really.

I mean I'm still a big runner, running is a big part of my life and so my body will do that quite well but when I try to go back into another sport, soccer was the other one, what we call football now, I still call it soccer, everyone knows what I mean, the one with the round ball and Jack Tamer has made a mind, got me back into a social game of that and I was doing pretty well until I was running away from a couple of 30 something guys and then the old Achilles went with a calf and I was on the ground and so it really distressed me because it got in the way of my running so I kind of picked my moments and I find if I get back into a sport like that then the old body's not that enthusiastic, the mind's in it.

I hear you.

So we've got a really beautiful seg lined up, friend of the show Patty Gower suggested you organise yourself as a political editor like a test cricket captain, he said, I'm going to quote him, he'd set the field, he'd bowl for the occasion, he'd bat for the wicket, hit the odd six and put the bad ball away and he also likened you to a cricketer in the press gallery, he said he was the best, he was precise, deadly consistent, like a good fast bowler, line and length very strategic, could set a good field.

Is that sound fair?

It's very kind from Patty and I didn't quite set the world on fire like Gower does, I mean Gower would come in and just blow it all up like a Lance Keynes, Chris's dad.

Been on the pod.

Yeah, good dude, yeah, amazing guy, but yeah I guess I probably am quite a strategic person I suppose in that sense, I take stuff seriously that I want to do well and chip away at it, I've had to work quite hard at things I've done and you know it is a nice segue from the cricket because it's kind of the same thing, like I was nowhere near the natural talent of Chris Keynes obviously or Stephen Fleming, I had to really chip away and I've had to work at stuff that I've done like that, I haven't had masses of natural talent that's just burst into it, I have had to be quite disciplined and be quite strategic, so yeah I probably did approach my political journalism like that, I'd never thought about it but as always Patty's probably pretty on the money.

We'll be right back after this short break.

I want to sort of paint the picture in and take you right into the parliamentary press gallery, so you worked for 10 years as a journalist and then you edited the Sunday Star Times, and then you've gone over to TVNZ, you've become the political editor, so you're anchor in Q&A, you've done the gender and breakfast before you switch over to three, but in this period where you're the TVNZ political editor, I was wondering if we could talk a little bit about, I'm not sure we call it the golden years, but we're you're on one station and Duncan's on the other, and Patty again has come in and he said, I was an awe of Guy in and Duncan Garner, they were incredible when at the peak of their powers, one different

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channels but taking each other on and going for beers afterwards, the rest of the gallery was jealous, they were accused of colluding, and then yeah, that period's fascinating to me, what do you recall of that time?

Yeah, again, he's pretty on the mark there, Duncan and I were very close friends at that point, and we were also fierce competitors, that's quite a strange situation to be in, and we used to play with that, he'd thump me most of the time for the first few years, you know, he'd deck me, an incredible political journalist, I sort of almost credit Duncan Garner with inventing the political TV track, you know, the package that we see now, he kind of almost invented that style, a formidable tough journalist, and so competing with him was absolutely full on, and I had to be pretty strategic about that, we used to say we'd compete at home and collude abroad, abroad we probably would, you know, give each other a bit more of a break, but we used to have each other on, you know, what you'd do, you'd run around breaking some story, and then you'd do a live every night, and the press gallery is just this corridor, and all the doors are open to the different newsrooms, and so what you'd do is you'd lined your exclusive up, your tape package, you had it already down, and then you put your feet up on the desk, so when the guy walked past, he'd think, oh he's been, he doesn't have a track tonight, and then the after he'd walked past, in the earpiece went, you'd be out on the forecourt, and you knew, and you were doing it to beat the other guy, because you loved him as well, but you wanted to smash him, it was just like in that sports thing, and so you knew that he'd be watching, and his bosses would be watching, one and three, and then you'd be lead story, and their phone would ring, and why haven't you got that yarn, and the same thing would happen to me, you know, we'd go to the landline on the desk, you'd pick it up, and you'd go, oh yeah guy, I'm just watching three, did we know about this, and you'd be like, oh yeah we decided it wasn't a story or some excuse, but yeah so we'd compete hard, and it was a lot of fun, if you were going up to Auckland from Wellington to knock off some exclusive talent, you know there was a bit of a code that it was an admin day, it's like, oh you're just doing some admin mate, and the other guy'd be like, oh my god he's doing admin, and he'd be running around trying to find out what you were up to, oh it's just an admin day mate, yeah and just, are you texting each other as well, as you're watching a story, you bastard, see you at six, watch it in week, really is it, that's amazing, yeah it was hard out, you know we'd give each other absolute death, and it was the only way to get through it in a way, with a bit of a help from our liquid friends, you know which was a big part of that, but yeah a strange position, we had our fallouts, one time he got hold of my poll results which cost about ten grand in those days to do one poll, and ran them like on a Friday night, how did he get hold of them, well there was an internal investigation at TVNZ into that, and I think they fingered the guy, but they couldn't quite prove it, you can't do that in 2023, you cannot finger anyone, they got the guy, but nothing actually yeah they happened, so that was how fierce it was, it's a good thing we didn't come to blows, because there was no question about who would have come off seeking best in that, I'm glad you're pulling the curtain back on the press gallery, because it's a term that I flippantly used, I didn't one know actually what it physically was, but two you're so right, as consumers we see the track, we don't see anything that goes on behind the

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scenes, and that's the part that fascinates me is the manoeuvring and the gamesmanship between the two, yeah two wily old heads at the top of their game, yeah and you talk about where it is, because the geography if you like is quite important, because it's really weird when you go into the press gallery from outside in a newsroom, because especially I don't think the media is as competitive as it was, but that's my view, but you had obviously you got a close shop building as a media organisation, so as a press gallery journalist to walk in and suddenly you've got 30 other media organisations, they're all with the doors open in this corridor, and they're all hunting in the same pack, you will have seen on the TV, you know the division bells ringing, you hear that noise in the background, and they're all white tiles, and they're all big press gallery pack asking their questions, so what do you do if you've got an exclusive, well you don't want to be there asking your question about consultants fees or whatever it was, do you, so you've got to find a little corner of the building, pull them aside, you know it's strategic, it's like a cluedo game, you know, and you've got to find a place that you can hold on to this exclusive, like holding on to an exclusive for a day or maybe even two days with 30 other reptiles lurking around is not easy, and how big is your team, back in those days it was 4 or 5, yeah TVNZ was always slightly bigger being public sector, so I think we maxed out at 5, but our best work was done when there were 3 of us, and against his 3, weirdly that was the best it was, and TV3 would always be 3 people back in those days, yeah so to be sort of 3 on 3, and as a political editor you'd be managing the other people's stories as well as your own, and then you'd be live most nights, which was pretty stressful really, you know especially you'd come over from newspapers, live television is pretty frightening, some of the younger ones they grow up with their lives and they're really used to being on camera, so I found it quite full on, quite stressful to come over from you know 10 years of newspapers straight into TV, so that was an added element of stress for me.

Yeah it is a weird day isn't it, where it builds towards that sort of 6pm and then afterwards there's that release, and we've talked to a lot of guests who have done similar work where there's just that big outlet afterwards and you go for a beer, you unwind and that's an important part of your job really, like in order to maintain it day after day you need that release and it's just a unique and bizarre situation that you go and have beers with the person you are most at competition with, it's so unique.

But also your subjects as well occasionally right?

Oh yeah yeah I mean in those days 3.2 which was at the bar because it's on the 3rd floor in Beehive, was roaring in full steam, when I first came into the press gallery in the late 90s it was, in 1998 I came into the press gallery for the evening post newspaper which doesn't exist anymore but it was a great paper at the time, you know still smoking in bars and you'd go in there and Winston would be in there, Doug Graham would be in there with a cigar, you'd have to get your suit dry cleaned after about 7 minutes if being in the bar because it absolutely, it was a classic you know smoky bar scenario, with dark secrets being traded in the corner and as a kid, I call myself a kid, I was about 27 but I was a pretty young 27, you know it was fascinating to me and yeah it was a big part of the culture there, there was still a very heavy drinking culture in the late 90s, it was probably the

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end of the really heavy drinking culture, remember we're coming off the back of a New Zealand where the Prime Minister announced a snap election, utterly wasted, not just a little bit tipsy after a couple of beers but completely and utterly smashed and anyone who wants to go and Google it and see the footage on YouTube nowadays or on Nathonga Sound and Vision or whatever it's on, it's utterly astonishing, the guy can barely speak, there wasn't a word mentioned about it in the newspapers the next day, that gives you the level of acceptability that it had in political life and in wider culture and I say in the book you know that this started in 1854 when Parliament met for the first time, the very first law they passed was allowing MPs to drink in Parliament, wow, that's the very first thing the legislator did when the House met for the very first time, the first petal legislation on the books is a rule allowing MPs to drink at Parliament, your priorities right there, so it's kind of like you know start as you mean to continue really.

So one of our sources and you might be able to work out who this is given the question has suggested we ask this question, so you Duncan and John Key, pre Prime Minister go for a drink, it was quite controversial at the time and it got leaked to the Sunday Star Times but only one of you three could have leaked it, who leaked it and why?

Well I say in the book that Duncan Garner swears it wasn't him and I believe him, so you know and part of the cryptic stuff with politics and you saw I've probably absorbed a bit too much of this, is he get answers like that and you gotta go shit am I gonna run it or not, yeah, what would you do with that, who leaked it, yeah John Key, that's my conclusion too, it wasn't John Key, well I've heard that wrong, yeah I thought the clue was the Sunday Star Times given your previous involvement with the publication but then I thought oh maybe not, yeah I mean that was a number of years before that story got from the bar to the front of the newspaper but yeah why there's still some sensitivity about it, it's technically off the record isn't it, no one ever said oh look it's off the record but we knew it was off the record but you know time rolls on and everything in there is true and yeah he wouldn't be worried about it.

That's what I wanted to ask you is the off the record, when you're in the smoky bars back in the day, is anything genuinely off the record, yeah it is in that you wouldn't ever go and report that you know Doug Graham told me in the bar that such and such but you're allowed to act on the information, you know so if someone says to you look didn't come from me mate but you know that decision on the frigate that they were looking at making on Monday, it's off the table they're not gonna do it, it ain't gonna happen, a good journalist would use that information as you know as a starting point and try and firm it up you know most people wouldn't let you run it anyway and I wouldn't want to run it just on one source in a bar but if it was coming from someone pretty good you know if it was the defence minister maybe you would but you'd use that to then you know firm it up and a lot of politics is political journalism is like that and yeah you can run away and run the stories and some of the younger ones do but you look pretty foolish if you're wrong and your reputation doesn't last that long if you get it wrong you know, so your reputation has got to be everything right?

Yeah it does really in that sort of area and it's pretty you know it's long to build up and quick to lose really.

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Is there any instances of people throwing red herrings to test someone's kind of situation especially when they first start?

Oh yeah disastrous ones, I remember one press secretary who had a youngish gallery guy who'd taken over and wanted to make a big splash and there had been some big inquiry into this press secretary's minister, he's been accused of this wrongdoing and his press secretary to make the minister look good for this inquiry leaked him the bits of the report that made him look like he'd been vindicated and the guy ran it as a big yarn on one of the Sundays and then the full inquiry came out on the Monday or Tuesday and it was like yeah those parts looked pretty good for your guy but the other 700 pages didn't and it was a bit of a laughing stock, I still remember it today, don't know so and having a laugh about it now so yeah that's not cool so you've got to be pretty careful about being used because it does happen everyone's you know it's a bit of a, it's quite a few piranhas in the pond if you want to put it that way.

You were one of the biggest stars at TVNZ, like we said Q&A, Agenda and Breakfast and then you moved to TV3.

What was that?

Cross the floor.

Cross the floor.

Yeah I did, I crossed the aisle.

That's a big move, was it a hard decision to make, why did you move?

I wanted to move from Wellington and I wanted to leave Parliament while I still loved it and I still do and I loved my time there and I wanted to move and I'd been talking, I'll be honest with you I've been talking to TVNZ at the time about how you know I wanted to move from Wellington, I wanted to, I'd done nearly 15 years in the press gallery, some of those newspapers, a lot of it for TVNZ and I said to them look I want to move to Auckland and start something new and we were working through you know could I get this hybrid gig where I'd do some you know doco style yarns for Sunday and sort of one of those hybrid sort of gigs with different sort of portfolios in it and TVNZ was a little bit of a mess at the time and then Head of News resigned and the whole thing just sort of fell apart and I met Mark Jennings for probably a wine at the time and he had an opening on 60 Minutes and I thought I'll bugger it, I'll have a crack, you know I wanted to get and do some investigative reporting and so I came across a TV3 where my mate Duncan was and Duncan Garner and I started two new shows, The Vote and The Degree which we launched when we lost the licence to 60 Minutes, we launched that as a current affairs show and in the end only he did two years at TV3 but...

He must have been so excited because he was losing his biggest rival and he was gaining his mate to come on site like happy days with Duncan Garner.

That's right and we had a lot of fun and we hosted the Degree together, I mean this has been one of the cool things that I'm smiling about now is that I've had a chance especially in my later years to work with some of my friends, I've been hosting Morning Report with Cory and Dan who's a very close friend of mine this week so it's pretty cool to do something you love but also with people that you really like to.

Yeah I'm keen to move into the Morning Report stuff, 2014 you joined Morning Report and last

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night doing my research I was sort of looking through old clips and things and I thought oh I'll just have a look at that really memorable Winston Peters interview from 2017.

Amazing.

I'll just watch a few minutes of it just to remind myself what was said and I ended up watching the whole thing, 25 minutes.

It was so captivating, the cat and mouse, the Winston sends someone to go and get the forms and then there's the stuff wrong, like the mental gymnastics, you can tell you've got this relationship, like this deep past relationship, you're kind of giving each other smirks and things, is that one of the most memorable interviews you've done?

I think it is the most memorable interview I've done.

It would be my favourite interview and you've touched on some of the reasons there.

I had decided and told Morning Report I really wanted to do a series of leaders interviews before that 2017 election and I said I wanted to do them to do 25 minutes so that they would be 7.35 to 8 o'clock you know and there's no commercials on that so 25 minutes is quite a long time for a politician.

Someone like Winston can start a fight, throw a grenade, he accuses you of being a Nazi or something, you take the bait and start arguing with him and then he's run down the clock like the All Blacks used to do and it's all over.

What you've seen that interview is him looking at the clock realising he can't do that, there's another 20 minutes to go and I'd also been losing sleep about where I was going to go on this because the guy came into Parliament 1978 so there's a fair bit of ground to traverse if you wanted to but I thought no I'll just stick purely to whether his costings added up, just that narrow, I'll just focus on that and just pick away at that and that tactic sort of kept him, you know if we want to go back to quickening analogies, just he had to play and he had to play and he had to play because it just kept on bowling that line of link that and didn't get rattled and didn't take the bait, you know I'd let the bounces fly by and got some pretty fascinating results, we called it the body and the boot interview afterwards because he gets one of his goons to go down and he claimed he wasn't sacked a third time and he claimed he's got evidence of it just in his boot so he gets his goon to come and I was like I took a risk because I said well why don't you go and get the evidence then and I thought maybe he's going to just leave in the studio but now he gets his goon in to go down and then the goon comes back about five minutes before the interview with this document and there's some sort of relitigation about whether or not he was sacked or not so yeah I mean Winston is a character isn't he?

But even that moment when Winston gets handed the thing and he's reading it, you don't know what he's reading and then he says it validates his position and then passes it to you and then I was wondering what's gone through your head, am I really going to read this and argue with him and I can see your decision is just like okay, can I get a copy of it?

You can't but the tone of it as well, I'm watching that as well and when you're going after the website, it's just in the moat, how much of that is just free flow, you're in the zone and you're just going for it?

That's actually a really perceptive question because the sort of moment that really resonated with people because the costings didn't just didn't stack up like he hadn't done the costings

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and then he was saying that the information on the website was wrong and so as entertaining some of that as a possibility and he said oh someone must have come into the website and changed the numbers and at that point he said come on mate, come on mate.

And I think it's the public I think kind of like that because you kind of have that plausible deniability in political interviewing at times don't you, when you know he's bullshitting, the interviewer knows he's bullshitting but everyone's too polite to go around the edges of it.

So that was a kind of lift the curtain moment to a degree where it's just like come on, this is crap.

It was the come on mate, the mate part of it, it spoke to, there's obviously a long history of time spent together and there must be a, while it outwardly doesn't look like that, there must be a mutual respect between the two of you.

Oh yeah, no he's run into me and had big laughs, we've had huge nights out on the turps. In Fiji?

Yeah, Fiji, yeah who said that, yeah Fiji and others, yeah gosh that was a story, happy to talk about any of that, within the bounds of defamation.

Yeah, let's go there because it was one of our sources that suggested to ask him what his best Winston Peters drinking story was and was it in Fiji?

Yes, yeah well good segue, good segue.

You saw an opportunity, I just went for it.

Yeah that's right.

No, extraordinary man and extraordinary constitution, you could use that word in a number of ways it was fitting, but he, on that occasion we were in Suva, Baini Maram was in power, Winston was foreign minister, it would have been in the 05 to 08 Clark governments, he was the foreign minister, it was first crack at being a foreign minister and he did well, he looks good in a suit and he loved the job and we'd had a huge day and a huge night and then Winston sort of entered the fray about midnight and got someone to get him a bottle of scotch and a couple of packets of durries and I remember looking around and seeing that just about all my colleagues were gone and I think one or two of us were there with Winston and I remember scraping what was left of my soul up off the ground and getting into some hotel and feeling like I'd eaten sandpaper the next day, you know that sort of feeling and we struggled along to film this event that he was doing and walked in there and he had been up all that time and he wiped the floor with everyone, Alexander down all his foreign ministers were around and he was articulate, he was professional, he was exuberant, all of those things and I just looked at him and thought, you know, who sent you? Who are you? You know? And he might not like this but I remember I told his press secretary, James Finnell, at the time, I said, oh yeah, I had this massive night out with Winston and it was quite complimentary about him. I must have got back to Winston and just before we were about to jump on the plane, phone rang and it was Peter's and he was utterly livid with me and he's very very private, you know, he did not want anyone to know about that so he probably won't like this but he could be a strange private man, he's like that with smoking as well, you know, he keeps his drinking and smoking very much to himself which I guess is prerogative and maybe he reflects his age and generation too to some degree but he was really really

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upset that I'd even talked to his press secretary about it which was quite an interesting coda to the night.

When you're drinking with Winston Peters, obviously it's all off the record, are you talking policy, are you talking anything that relates to what you do or is it all just other stuff which doesn't affect politics?

No, you'd usually be, I mean that was the good thing about that kind of environment and there were numerous nights, not nearly as big as the Green Parrot, I don't know if you know the Green Parrot, it's his favourite restaurant in Wellington, so it's a steak house really and they come out with about 15 pieces of white bread with butter on it and that's your starter, that's the entree and then the main course is just a plate of steak and he used to smoke durries inside when you weren't allowed to smoke durries inside anymore but you know, just hoi otawaka you know, he used to just go for it and you'd be yarning, you'd be saying oh this policy is crap or what about you know Birch has done this or why are you guys doing that and it was all pretty free you know, it was all pretty free and pretty good and when you're a politics nut you just love that you know, I mean that's like being able to talk to you know, I don't know, one of the big rugby players or whatever and just talk shop with all them and you know, and he'll remember something, he'll be telling you stuff and you learn a lot too in those kinds of environments, talking off the record to politicians.

But to Stevie's question, do you delve into like how's your kids and how, do you go beyond going on the journalist and Winston the politician or are those roles assigned regardless of your interaction?

That again is a bloody good question and I'd never thought about it but you're right, it's the latter.

Right.

And I'd never thought about that but that's exactly what you do do and you could go I never asked Winston Peters about his personal life ever.

Yeah.

About his mum or his girlfriend or whatever it was at the time and you didn't with those politicians.

No, you're right, it was, we were roles in a movie in our own heads.

You know, and I played the role of a political journalist, a journalist, yeah and none of the politicians would do that or a couple who, you know I remember when my mum died for example, there were a couple of politicians who, they were just probably more caring people.

Yeah.

It was, you know, we've had a massive injection of expectation of empathy nowadays that sort of drifts into all aspects of our work lives, right, that didn't really exist then I reckon.

True, true.

And you know, if you lobbed up, you were a guy in Espen, a journalist for the evening post or whatever and that's how you'd be treated and no one really was too interested in, you know, whether you'd just been divorced or had your third kid, that was certainly the way, or maybe that was me to a degree, maybe that was just what I was angling at but certainly, yeah, it was all, it was all shop talk.

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We'll be right back after this short break.

That was a fantastic seg.

I do want to link us back to that 2017 interview, your most memorable one, perhaps your favourite.

Afterwards, after the cameras stop, I can sort of see you smiling, I'm assuming he's smiling off camera, like what does it look like in those minutes after that interview?

Well, Winston Peters has this great Cheshire cat grin that he'll deliver to you just after he's delivered a withering sort of blow, so I think he deployed that.

I felt pretty good after that one, so, you know, and in some ways it was probably one of the only times where I felt like I'd walked out of the ring with a points victory over Peters.

He's bloody hard to interview.

I tell you, he's incredibly difficult to interview and I did feel, and yeah, look, if that feels a bit, you know, a bit much and a bit competitive, well, sorry, but it is, you know, it is a bit like that and it is competitive, you know, and you are trying to derail them, actually, not to try to crush their skulls into the ground for sort of brutality, but you're trying to get a politician, you're trying to derail them because, you know, they want to go straight down their train track of their talking points.

You've been listening a bit to Morning Report recently.

You might hear Chris Luxon, he's got a sheet there for the radio interview and if it says current down on the top, he's been calling me current down because even though he knows me pretty well because we've had yards, I've done pieces on him and stuff, but my point being that politicians are really, really scripted in what they want to say and you've got to be, you've got to be quite strategic and creative to get them off that, so you've got to have a plan.

You've really got to have a plan otherwise it's just, you know, it's just a bunch of questions and anyone can do that.

I think Winston is quite unique because you're trying to derail them.

I think it's rare for a politician to try to derail you at the same time.

We had Jack Tame on who talked about a memorable Winston interview when he kept calling him James Tame and he actually talked about the advice you gave him.

He's like, he's going to try to drop your little breadcrumbs, just stay on track, don't go for them because he tries to derail you.

It's unique.

Is that unique to Winston?

It absolutely is and it's a good lesson if you've interviewed Winston and I tell this to journalists, you've got to have an exit strategy.

Like what's your exit strategy if he turns it around on you?

You've got to have one and I learned that in a gender early on when I'd just started television interviewing and I love television interviewing, the art of the long-form interview and I'd watched Ian Fraser as a kid and I loved the long-form interview and the craft of it and I had watched Winston a number of times and I thought, what am I going to do if he turns it around on me and I had a line that I had actually practised and so he did exactly that in a live television interview and started asking me the questions and I

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said to him, look, if you want to learn shorthand, go to Polytech, get a journalism degree and ask the questions you can but right now I'm asking the questions and you're giving the answers and my question is X and it was because I can still remember it now.

Do you still use it now?

I wouldn't use that one but I'd use something, I'd use it.

If you are going to go for someone, you've got to have an exit strategy.

I remember Winston Peters on a program and I won't name the interviewer, it was live on television at high pressure moment, the allegation was involving whether New Zealand First Party had somehow changed its position in return for some favours and Scampi was part of the deal, it was about Scampi catch and I won't go into too much detail because it was a source of endless litigation and Peters turned to the interviewer and said, yeah, I sold my soul for a plate of fish and at that point the interview was all over effectively because he'd won the public and it looked ludicrous so what are you going to do when the person turns the tables on you?

I think in that same interview or another one I'd seen him say, where did you get that fact from and the interviewer said, my researcher and at that point it was all gone.

That's why in a strong interview if you're taking someone on, you said in the Herald on July the 17th 2007 that quote bang or OECD figures from X say this, you've got to source your stuff, not in a casual interview with a hurricane survivor or whatever but if you are going to take on a politician like Winston Peters you're going to have it all nailed down and you've got to have an exit strategy for what to do because he will turn the tables on you and he's about the only one who does, he learned it the foot of Moldoon and I don't think any of them nowadays would really do that, there might be one who comes along and does, David Seymour might, he can be fairly gnarly but not many who would do it in the way Winston Peters does.

I love that you still remember the exit strategy word for word all these years later, that was so good.

And also like again hearing you speak about it and then having watched it freshly, your quote at your, these are your words, these are your words that I'm reading, that's what you were saying back to Winston in that interview so you can't twist and turn and get out of it from his perspective.

Yeah, I mean you hear interviewers saying why has the National Party used a dog whistle strategy on Three Waters, that's a hopeless question because where is it written down, then you're just going to get into an argument about where the so and so is being racist or dog whistling, you've actually got to, I mean the analogy I use is you're running rats down a corridor and if you don't close off all the side doors, they can take anyone they want and they will and they'll run down the clock, they'll run out the side, you've got to close all the doors and run them right out the back and to do that you need to be specific.

You really love journalism don't you?

Yeah, I do and I love the art of the interview.

Yeah.

Yeah.

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Is it that obvious?

Yeah, it's great.

It's really fascinating.

Obviously we're in the game of interviewing so it's so great hearing this from you.

Does Winston, I'm sorry, we're not going to spend the whole time talking about Winston but I do have one more question.

Did you fall out with him?

Like does he have a line where if you push him too hard, he's not going to respond to you anymore?

Like was that interview?

Yeah, I think, and it wasn't that interview really.

I think probably he would be fairly well disposed to me now.

The relationship could have survived that interview is when I started looking into the New Zealand First Foundation and getting the documents on the New Zealand First Foundation which ended up with a court case, choosing my words carefully here because again there are some litigious people involved and this was about the donations that that party received and we probably did 20 stories on that, all of them valid and there wasn't one fact that was contested but he did not like that.

And you know there's a symbiotic relationship between the media and Winston Peters. He pretends he hates them but can't do without them and they pretend he's evil but have built their careers on him and there's this sort of mutual thing happening there and it's all done with a wink and a smile and a nod but the gloves were off there because we had a duty to pursue the story in the public interest but he didn't like it.

I imagine if I ran into him today we'd probably laugh about it now but I don't know.

Zooming out the wider morning report, five years there, I think you said you've done over a thousand shows.

Over time does the research and prep you do for each day get less and less?

Yeah, it's interesting because I ran into Tover O'Brien the other day and we were having a chat about getting up at crap o'clock in the morning and I said to her that one of the lessons I learned was that sleep, Trump's prep, in that if you get up, you better to get up at four o'clock in the morning than three in the morning because that extra hour is better spent sleeping than prepping.

With morning report, some days you'd be doing 10 interviews in the morning but all interviews aren't created equal so I did Hipkins this morning and if there was a pie chart on it I would have spent 70 or 80% of my prep time on that one interview because it was the PM and I wanted a nobleman, a consultant spending so I wanted to know what had been spent on consultants and for example MB and it was 100 million but I wanted to know how many staff they had and they had just over 5,000 staff, 5,000 staff but that's a great number to have.

But then you can say to them, it'll be 100 million dollars on consultancy for MB, how many staff do they have?

Because you're doing a couple of things there because there's the silent and then you're like 5,000 and it has more of an impact so you've got to do your, so I thought I'd dig

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into that and have a close look at that so you prep but not equally, it's like swatting for an exam, you get in there and you've got to pick your moments, I reckon you'd be foolish to divide the time in 10 because sometimes you're talking to a correspondent who's got all the info anyway, sometimes you're talking to someone who's found a penguin or something and sometimes you're talking to the PM so you've got to pick your moments, pick your battles.

I assume in Morning Report that you would have like a structure and an agenda set out for how the morning's going to go and things would change very quickly.

Were there times where you were very underprepared for an interview that you had to do straight away and you didn't know about the subject at all and you just kind of have to bluff your way through?

Oh yeah absolutely, I mean sometimes a minister has said that they won't come on and then suddenly they ring in and the producers saying Judith Collins or Stephen Joyce were two of the people who did that a few times I remember and you'd suddenly be thrown into it. So yeah sometimes it is a seat of the pants stuff.

For those who don't know, I mean you stepped away from Morning Report a few years ago and you got into investigative journalism but you are back, you said you were doing it this morning, you're stepping in just a week-on, week-off basis just to cover and...

Yeah that's right and I've been really enjoying it because I've come back to it and I think I've come back to it with more lightness because it's not my program.

When you have a Program A, you really worry about the ratings and you worry about how it's going.

Yes we do, that's exactly what we do and there's quite a lot of pressure there.

I took over from a guy who spent 39 years there, 39 years, it's like Jeff Boycott, no one could get him out.

You're just flowing aren't you, he's cricketing an allergy.

Yeah it is a bit obsessive.

It's really good.

So there's a lot of pressures like Morning Report and people in Wellington, Auckland's a bit different.

I wish it was a bigger deal in Auckland but in Wellington everyone listens to Morning Report.

It's kind of weird, I was walking down Lampton Key the first morning after I'd done Morning Report and people would stop you and say, I was listening to you in the shower today.

It is really weird, it's like oh man you're listening to me when you're getting dressed and it's just like, I don't know, you kind of feel seen in Wellington especially because it's just utterly in the fabric of that place because it's public service, a politics town right and it's a fairly serious show.

So I've come back and I'm more relaxed doing it and I think just showing a bit of a different side and having a bit more fun with it, if it's still not illegal to have fun on RNZ then you'd be doing it.

To follow your career, you have left a lot of these jobs when you've been doing really well at them.

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It seems like you sort of like a bit of change and a new challenge and you left Morning Report when you were a very exceptionally popular host and I think people were a bit surprised by that.

But I was hoping you could talk to us about journalism because you've gone back to being a reporter, investigative journalism.

You haven't even spoken about your 10 years in print but was it just, what was it a point in your life where you decided that you wanted to go back to what you originally started with or why did you leave and what are you doing now?

Yeah, it was September the 11th, 2018 and I was in hospital with DKA, diabetic keto acidosis.

I'm a type 1 diabetic which I didn't know until that point.

I got admitted to hospital and I was lying there thinking, what do I want to do?

This feels like a moment and one of the things I felt I hadn't done in journalism was actually break Berg investigative stories.

There was journalists that I'd admired and hadn't felt that I'd competed with them, the Oscar Alley's and the Duncan Garners and the Matt Nippets and David Fishers I suppose of the world and there are others and thought, I want to go back to being a reporter where the lowercase are.

Because interestingly in New Zealand journalism you get promoted to being a presenter, you don't do any journalism and they are the top jobs and people just cling on to them forever and then you've got the columnists all doing their thing that everyone reads and knows and they can see their pictures and stuff and the grunt work tends to be done in this ecosystem by the younger ones who haven't got as much experience and that's not to denigrate them at all, there's an incredible younger journalist there but it seems like the ecosystem is, everything else feeds off that right, because you can't get the commentary or the presentation without the actual journalism that's done on the ground and I thought what would be like if a grey beard, you know someone with a few years on the clock goes back as a reporter and calls himself a reporter and even calls himself a senior journalist nowadays doesn't he?

So I just thought well why don't I go back to being a reporter and call myself a reporter and think of myself as a reporter and just dig in and do these investigative pieces and that's what I did and I feel that that's some of the work that I've been the most proud of doing, you know our investigations into FAMAC and the SIS and the New Zealand First Foundation and police shootings and those sorts of stories, I'm incredibly proud of those and they are grunt work journalism and that's what I wanted to do and wanted to get back to doing.

You've done some fantastic work, you're top of the field, I wanted to know how you decide what to attack and I understand you've often got four or five things on the go at once but when that is happening, are you thinking I'm just going to pick an area where I think I could affect change or there might be something there and go digging in and see what you find, like how do you decide what to attack?

Yeah, it was sometimes and I like this saying that and the Washington Preschool has this saying that don't worry about the illegal stuff, concern yourself with what's legal

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because that's what society has accepted and I quite like that so you get these hiding and plain sight stories and in fact the drinking game, the book is a bit like that, you know this is a whole thing about illegal drug, right and legal marketing practices and you know there's nothing illegal going on there but it's what we are prepared to accept and sometimes that's the really interesting stuff to look at.

I did that with Lotto too so gee isn't it interesting we spend one and a half billion dollars on these lottery tickets and then we give 20 cents and every dollar back to the community and we think that that's somehow doing them a favor, you know and so you've got and it's often the poorer communities who are buying all these tickets and spending all this money.

Is it 20 cents and every dollar?

Yeah.

I thought it was 100%.

It's 20 cents, so it's 20 cents and every dollar, right, that's given back.

After you take all the marketing, all those incredible ads, Shot and Antarctica and everywhere and after you take the hundreds of thousands of dollars they pay the CEOs and all the stuff that they use, it's just over 20 cents.

It's 20 cents from the physical stores and it's about 25 cents if it's on the internet app because it's lower cost of delivery of service but yeah, it's a hell of a money go round.

It's about 350 million, they give that to the community out of a \$1.5 billion spend and of course there's the prize money too, right, so they've got to pay that out too.

But that's an example of just going, usually I look for money, power, moral ambiguity. So I did that with Farmac as well, just went, okay, here's this massive state agency that effectively can decide who lives or dies, they've got a restricted budget, there's moral sort of ambiguity here, how does this whole thing work and then just dig into that and then find the stories within that because people think, oh, investigative journalist, if you're waiting for someone to give you a great tip, sometimes that happens, a mate of mine gave me this great tip on the SIS which we did into a podcast and we followed up with a number of stories, in a country like New Zealand, if you're waiting for Deep Throat to give you a call from the car park about some big tip, you might be waiting a long time and so sometimes you just have to go, how does that work, why do we do that and sometimes I just start with thinking about an agency or a sector, I'm doing something on lobbying at the moment, how does political lobbying work, what do they do, who are the big players and then just digging in and seeing what you can find, so sometimes that's the approach I take.

Once you start pulling at that thread, does it become all-consuming?

Yeah, this is, I mean, with Morning Report you're done at 9.05 and especially if you've been doing it for a while then you gave it, you're all on the park and then you're gone for the day and you're back and doing it another day but with the investigative stuff, especially if there are more sensitive stories, you're taking a call at 7.30, your source is texting you at night, there's worry and there's threats of defamation, I remember when we were doing the New Zealand First Foundation stories there was a letter tabled in Parliament with a sort

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of a threat to sue me for \$30 million, I remember going walking every evening as the anxiety just rose just thinking how are we going to get through this, so it does hang over you a lot more when you're doing those sorts of yarns because you're spending at least a couple of months on them and then when it's about to come out, you're like, that's often quite high stakes.

You talk to threats, you won't go to China anymore based on some of the work that you've done?

No, I wouldn't go back to China.

I've been to China a few times but I wouldn't go back there after Red Line.

And is that just because of some of the things that you uncovered through the putting together of that story?

Yeah, I just, and I talked to others who said, yeah, that's a good strategy and some people who would be in the know that, look, you know, I don't want to overblow what would happen but I wouldn't, I don't think I'd be terribly welcome there, take very kindly to criticism so I wouldn't be rushing to get my tourist visa, no.

We'll be right back after this short break.

I think this has set the platform nicely to talk about the drinking game because we've touched on, you know, what an important part alcohol was through work, late night drinking with Winston Peters.

You know, this was a big part of your life and then decision to step away from it.

Can you tell us about where it started from and give us the whole story?

Yeah, yeah, so if I start at the end of the drinking, it was just one Sunday morning in 2019 and I didn't take the date and write it down in the diary because I didn't want to know, I didn't want to be one of those guys who counts off the days but I had just had a dinner party at home and I couldn't remember what had happened after about 9.30. My wife at the time said I hadn't done anything too silly or anything crazy and I just decided that morning that that was it, you know, I'd wasted all my chances, you know, I was a cat with 90 lives if you like.

I had tried every mitigation strategy going, you know, I'd be, oh, drink low strength beer until 9 o'clock and then cut into the real stuff.

Oh, it's red wine that got me that time, I'm not going to drink red wine anymore.

Oh, download the app that tells me how many units I've had.

Oh, I only drink Thursday, Friday, Saturday, whatever it was, every time it failed and there would have been 100 of those strategies because I didn't want to give up because I was so scared of giving up because of the social ramifications.

I thought that giving up alcohol would mean giving up friendships and relationships in social life.

You know, I really did, I was scared of that and so throughout that drinking time, some of which was quite damaging, let's be honest, a lot of it was fun too.

I'm going to be silly if it was easy, if it was just good and bad and, you know, good and evil then this would be an easy thing.

It's not like that.

I mean, I had some amazing times with alcohol and many people still do and I love being

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around people who are drinking so it's not like this, it's this terrible thing.

But yeah, I was really frightened of having to give up totally and that's why I tried all these strategies when really I should have realised by, wow, really by my early 20s that alcohol didn't suit me because I never had the off switch.

I didn't have that, I mean, some of the science now is saying that there is actually a signal from your liver to your central nervous system somehow that tells you how you've had enough and we all know people who don't have that signal, whatever it is, when they shouldn't have any more.

I was someone who would just override that signal, just didn't happen and so yeah, just getting back to that morning, I made that decision that morning and haven't drunk a drop since and haven't felt the urge to, I didn't feel I needed to go to any counselling or services, I'm not disrespecting people who do.

I didn't feel I had a chemical dependency, I clearly didn't because I didn't crave it.

So that possibly was easier for me but yeah, that's been it.

That's the last time I've drunk and it will be the last time that I do drink.

If anyone ever asks me why I stopped, that is it, that's my story.

Is that right?

Yeah.

The off switch, the I'll just do this, I'll do this, I'll do this, the mitigations, like that is 100, I'm captivated by that and just thinking fuck yeah, those are all, I've never been articulate enough to kind of piece it together but what you've said there is essentially like kind of my story, the same thing, like I had a moment where the decision was made, I had a wedding that weekend that I went to and I thought fuck, if I can get through the wedding, I'll be alright and I got through the wedding and it's just been the same thing ever since and I was interested in it because I've got a bugbear about this.

The term sober, are you sober, do you call yourself sober?

No.

Yeah, I'm the same.

No, I don't.

I don't call myself sober and I'm not a sober advocate, you know, I'm not like, oh you know, sobriety and stuff, this isn't my drug, it doesn't suit me and it never did, it was insidious too because this wouldn't happen all the time, I don't know about you, but it was about a six week thing, you know, so every six weeks I say, and sometimes be once every month but about six weeks just roughly, I'm just guessing, there'd be nights where I just couldn't remember what had happened and the weight of shame, it's just, it's hard to explain, oh well probably not for a lot of people listening because they will have felt it themselves but not drinking and that lightness of being that never having shame is really good, is really good, you can't explain how good that is because you never have that feeling about, did I do such and such, did I say that, what was then, check your phone in the morning and go fuck, did I, peace the night together through taxi receipts, text messages, you know it's funny for a while but yeah, shame bears a heavy burden, I reckon and it's just a really unpleasant thing, they call it anxiety now because unfortunately there's a chemical thing as well as an emotional thing because the alcohol actually does increase

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the anxiety and so you get this really sort of intense feeling and it just simply wasn't worth it anymore, I was an idiot to drink for as long as I did, you know, because it was clearly not a good strategy for me and part of the reason for writing the book was to tell people, hey you might be one of the probably 20 odd percent, maybe more people who doesn't suit you mate, doesn't suit you so it's okay not to drink it, we can all go out and have fun but it doesn't suit me so I'm not going to do it and I hope that that's becoming an easier path to take for people.

Is this a passion project for you, the writing of the book, is it part of that reconciliation with yourself?

Yeah probably is, again I hadn't thought about it in that way but yeah maybe it is, maybe it is, I had been wanting to do a book for a while and then when the proof documentary came out, Alan and Michelle Hurley from Alan and Unwin rang the next day and said would you do a book on it?

I wondered that was an extension of the book that you've done in that book.

It was, yeah an extension of the doco, yeah and I'd been toying around with a book and interestingly we'd talked about a book on Winston Peters and I didn't want to do that and then we were talking about a book on the John Key years which I was quite interested in and didn't do that and then this one I thought yeah because I can also, because it's a love letter to journalism too and we're all fascinated in interviewing and journalism and I wanted to get some of that stuff down like what the newsrooms were like back in those days, you know in the Whamaru Mail, the Christchurch Newspapers or whatever, like back in the day because as time goes on it is a little bit of history and so I wanted to get some of that down too so if it was a cocktail it would be part memoir, part history and part journalism really with a twist of advocacy possibly.

We had Patty Gower on our pod, maybe one of his last beers with us, we did it remotely but were you, you were instrumental, what role did you play when you can see someone else who's deciding whether or not they're going to go the same path, do you give advice, do you give them a nudge, what do you say?

I haven't been in that situation and I wasn't part really of Gower's decision.

Corinne Dan who's a mutual close friend of both of us was and that came across in the documentary and Corinne's wife Lotta, Lotta Dan who has been a real trailblazer in this speech and was recognised as such in the Queen's Birthday Honours and deservedly so. She's written a couple of books, The Wine O'Clock Myth and others and Mrs D is Going Without which was her first book and she's a close friend and she was one of the first person people I rang when I started to make that proof documentary and so she's been a big part in all this but yeah I haven't been in a position where I have been giving advice to people on that, people have talked to me about it and I just sort of try to draw them out and see where they're at with it and you know I certainly don't run around telling people what to do or make comments on it but I do talk to my friends who can ask me about what they think about and have good open conversations about alcohol and I think that's good because it's been a taboo subject really.

To mention someone's drinking, I don't know about you, did anyone say to you, hey mate you probably, because my experience was that people just didn't want to, it was like sex

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or politics, it was just something that wasn't talked about, even with a close partner, people don't in New Zealand have those conversations, maybe they do now, do they, I don't know. We had that ugly conversation.

You guys said Stephen and I, that's awesome, Stephen raised it with you, called me out on it.

Good on you man, because that's hard to do, it's harder for the person to do it, that's really cool.

I think so, I think, I knew, maybe like you did, I knew deep down it was problematic and I knew it was destructive and I knew it wasn't serving me anymore, but to have someone you respect that you love, take the time to have that conversation and knowing how, and I can't look at them at the moment, knowing how uncomfortable that must have been, but to go fuck it I'm going to push through and I'm going to tell them and I'm going to tell them straight and I'm going to tell them, if you do, you can get fucked because I don't want to be around that guy anymore, paraphrasing a little bit for the sake of a good sound bite, but I think then taking that and going, man, he's right, I know he's right, and I just needed to kind of hear that message at that time for whatever reason, and yeah, I don't know, maybe there been signs from other people before and I just didn't want to listen or didn't want to ignore it, but at that moment, in that climate, I just like, yeah, that's it, he's right, I'm done, and same as you, not a drop since and no desire to.

Yeah, it's amazing when it's off the table, it's just off the table, how your mind can just make that switch, but man, congratulations, that's such a cool thing to have done for someone because he's changed a life there and that's a brave thing to do, I don't hear that enough, so I think it's really cool.

Cheers.

Yeah, life's been a lot better since, yeah, totally, and I think to your point, the fact that once the decision was made, there was very little resistance from the other people that are in my circle, it was almost like the silence was deafening around the affirmation of the decision, it was like, yeah, it's 100% the right thing for you to do.

So yeah, maybe there just needs to be more brave conversations between mates and to push people into this position.

Yeah, absolutely, and to make it more acceptable to have those conversations, to bring it out of the taboo because there seems to be this position that it's a binary thing, you're either an alcoholic, which means you are some sort of piss wreck lying on the ground drinking gin or you're a normal drinker, and the normal drinker can go right to crazy levels of drinking, but as long as you can get up and do your job in the morning, then you're kind of just a normal drinker.

I was talking to someone in a brewery on the weekend, and they said the biggest move is at the low carb and the 0% beers, because of common situations like this, but it allows you to be a bit more social, it allows you to feel like you're having a beer.

That's interesting, isn't it, that the culture is moving away from it, but we still want that feeling of socially interacting with a beer?

Yeah, it's really interesting, and I talk about it in the book a bit, and some people might see me as a bit of a grump, but I don't use the no alcohol beers at all.

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I never wanted to, I don't want to go there.

Yeah, I don't want to pretend that I'm drinking a beer.

Have you done the same, Shamis?

Yeah, I've got, people have said that.

Just go for a zero, and I'm like, no, because I know myself, and I know if I go down that route, I'll allow myself a little bit of wiggle room, and then before I know it, it'll be, I'll just have a beer.

Same as me.

The next step will be a Fugazi or something, or two and a half percent, and then I'm working my way back up the shelf, you know.

I might be the totally the same.

Yeah, so I don't drink them at all.

But having said that, I think it's great for drinkers, you know, you can have two or three beers, and then you have a couple of no-lows, I think they call them, don't they?

No, low alcohol.

Yeah.

And that's cool, man.

Yeah.

I think, if it works for you, absolutely.

But yeah, for me, I'm just like, nah, I'm out, I don't want to pretend one, I'll just rather ignore it all together.

Yeah, flying off the shelves, I've got a number of friends that are really into them, you can have them in drive.

Look, I know we're pressed for time, we've got a couple of minutes left, there's a bunch of stuff we want to get to, but maybe we can just do a little bit on each.

First, I'm not really sure, this is my place to commend you on it, but your terreo journey, the way that you've brought it to the mainstream, your fluency in it, has been really inspirational.

I've struggled with that on this podcast, you know, there's been a number of times where I've tripped over words, but seeing how well you've done it has been really inspirational.

So thank you for that and bringing it out, can you just talk a little bit about how important that's been?

Yeah, yeah, it's been massively important.

I married a Māori woman and when we had our daughter Niko, we wanted to give her language and so in about 2017 when we'd made a decision that, you know, she was about three or four at the time that we were going to send her to a Rumaki school, you know, to a Māori immersion school, I saw, well, she wasn't at Kōhangari also, I wanted to give her the language at home and so I thought, I'd better learn and so I also didn't want to be left out when she was speaking with her friends later in life and so I just started hitting the books and just started learning and people like Stacy and Scotty Morrison were massive, you know, support for me and that and yeah, I just fell in love with the language and just wanted to do as much as I could and at the time I had the red light, had the mic and so I just started thinking, oh well, as I learn it, I'll try and share some more with the listeners and so I just started doing it off my own back.

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There was no, some people are like, oh, the New Zealand social engineering or something, it wasn't that, it was no strategy at all, it was just like, started with some greetings and then extended it to the point where we did some bilingual interviews, you would do, you know, ask the question in Māori but always translate it, so always translated every phrase I've ever used on ONZ, never left anyone behind so people will say, oh, but you don't translate it, well, the bit I say in English afterwards is what I've just said, so always do that, never want to be elitist about it or leave people behind or like, hey, this is, and try to have fun with it and I learned that kind of off the morrisons who are just amazing advocates for it without making people feel bad, it's just like, have a go, it's not a precious vase that if you drop it, it's going to break, it's not this thing, it's a language, you know, let's bring it to life and have it as, you know, something that has utility and agency and you can use it, it's not this thing to put in a glass case and only people with special powers can use it, it's our language from this land and so we can, you know, we can use it and I think we're all getting to that space a bit more now but that was the kind of a, that was kind of a cope-up of it at that time in 2017. Yeah, you can't do the rail without Te Aum Māori as well, so have those two sort of come hand in hand?

Yeah, massively, I mean, some people are like, oh, you know, I'm going to learn it like French and you hear a lot of politicians say there's nothing there from the right place and I'm going to get a tutor and stuff but you can't, you've got to go to the Wanangan, you've got to go to the Nohomarai and you've got to, you know, so you can't, I don't think you can separate the two things out.

I mean, for me with my daughter and her school and it's a Māori community and, you know, so I haven't had to try that hard to get into that so that's kind of just been the way that it sort of rolled so I've been incredibly lucky in there and the support from Māori, once you can say to other pākehā who are nervous about that, has just been incredible. I have had no one, the people who have criticised me have all been pākehā, for speaking. Running, just quickly, you run two marathons a year every year for 10 years, you've done a run with Cathy Freeman, Cathy Freeman.

And I think there's a story that you ran about 42Ks one Christmas day, like running is a very important central part of your life.

Why is it so important?

Yeah, probably run, I probably run for my head as much as for my heart, yeah, when my mother died and I'd also broken up from a long-term relationship, this is about 03, 04, around that sort of time, I found myself with a lot of time on my hands.

My mate Corrand Dan said, why don't you run around the bays in Wellington, it's like a 5K run or something and I did that and I quite enjoyed it and then I just started running and running more and found it to be a really amazing thinking time as you got used to doing and I still run five times a week, it's half marathons nowadays, I've got one coming up in a couple of weeks.

Five times a week, how far do you run?

Just 10K a time, yeah, so I'm not doing the big distances, but I do run five times a week, 10K is a pretty big distance to a lot of people, yeah, well, I mean, once you

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build up it's amazing what you'll get used to, but yeah, it's problem solving time for me, you know, and it's still a massive part of my mental health, when I can't do it I get pretty ratty, so yeah, it's still a massive part of my life.

Just the last one for me, you look great, you're running five times a week, you're in a job, back to your roots that you love, you're off the booze, is this peak going?

Well, you know, I try to make each year better than the last, like what haven't I done that I want to do now, what's the next challenge, what am I going to do, so yeah, I don't like to sit still, I do like to keep moving and so, yeah, hope I haven't quite peaked yet.

Thank you so much, Shay is our outro guy and I know he's got a good one lined up, I like to do these on the fly every time, let me just say thank you so much for coming in, sharing your time with us.

This has been great fun, I've really enjoyed it and it's been a really, really good interview and yeah, it's just really cool to have a arm with people who have really dug in deep and looked at it, so thank you.

It means a lot coming from you, Shay.

Okay, I'm going to borrow from two of your colleagues first and then I'm going to try and round it out, so Patty Gower said, and this is kind of where I was going earlier, I'll read this, he's a journal to his bones mate, he did some stories recently about prisoner rights, he said to me, nobody cares about prisoners, fuck it, I do, he's a great man, ethical as fuck and I still look up to him and Jack Tame said, I've never, and I say this as someone who spent 17 years in the business, met anyone who cares as much about journalism as Gion, and today has been, and the research particularly has been a lesson in storytelling and the joy in storytelling and what I get fascinated by is the fact that you can tell a story in a news track for TVNZ or TV3, you can do it through an interview and you can do it through a long form story, you can do it through Docker, you can do it through all of the mediums that we have access to now and that flexibility and the art of the narrative and asking good questions and storytelling which is what we try and do here on the podcast has been incredibly inspirational to kind of see how you've done that, but from a personal perspective you shining the light on an area that particularly resonates with me and not only the alcohol documentary that you did but also your take on drugs, I had a very narrow perspective of drugs and what I thought was drugs and watching Wasted really made me change my perception on that and I think that's something, I don't know, put words or thoughts or feelings into your mind but that whole element of sharing and shining the light so people can make their own decisions and form decisions based on that is a really, really important skill particularly in the age of misinformation now, so I love what you do and I've learnt so much just in the week of preparation for this and to have the opportunity to sit and hear you speak and be in your presence has been amazing so thank you very much for coming in.

Oh that's awesome, that means a lot, that's absolutely lovely and thank you, thank you both.

And books out now?

The books out now, The Drinking Game and All Good Bookstores I think is the phrase, time out, the whole works, yeah.

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The other one I'm always interested in, is you going to do an audio book?

You know, weirdly, given I'm on radio, someone else asked me that, that's a good idea, so maybe I should.

You definitely should.

I probably should do that, shouldn't I, but yeah, The Drinking Game, it's out now, Alan and Unwin, so yeah, have a read.

Check it out, cheers guys.

Hey guys, if you've made it this far, hopefully that means you've enjoyed this episode and if you feel strongly enough about it to share on social media, that would be much appreciated.

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Catch you next week.