

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

ABC Listen.

Podcasts, radio, news, music, and more.

When Ben Gillies was a kid,

he formed a band with two mates from school.

Lots of kids do that.

But this band became Silverchair,

and by the time Ben was 15,

his band had a number one single,

and their debut album went gangbusters around the world.

Silverchair toured the US.

They supported the Ramones and the Red Hot Chili Peppers.

They played on the roof of Radio City Music Hall

at the MTV Music Awards.

And when they weren't doing that,

they were putting on their uniforms

and riding their bikes to school at Newcastle High.

Silverchair made five albums together,

all of which debuted at number one on the Aria charts.

But, surprise, surprise,

being a teenage rock and roll star wasn't all roses.

Ben has worked hard to make a real life for himself

as a grown-up, one who still loves music,

still loves hanging out with his mates in Newcastle,

but with a wiser head on his shoulders.

He and Silverchair bass player Chris Jonu

have written a book about their life in the band,

but about more than that, about their friendship.

It's called Love and Pain.

Hi, Ben.

Hello.

Take me back to Newcastle when you were growing up.

What kind of town was it?

What do you remember?

Newcastle was very working class when I was growing up.

Very blue collar.

There was the steelworks and a lot of trades.

Like, my dad was a plumber.

Yeah, it was just very working class, you know?

It was a simple life.

So, if your dad was a plumber,

did that mean he was in charge of DIY at home?

Oh, yeah. Yeah, yeah.

Dad was the guy that could build anything.

The garage was like a wonderland.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

You could go in there and, you know, had jars of multiple different size screws. And, yeah, you could make anything. And also, being a plumber as well, I'm sure any trade can relate to this, is we had water tanks everywhere. There was taps everywhere. Like, we had three different types of water available in the backyard. There was boar water, town water, tank water. You want water? You've got it at your place. Did he teach you? Was he wanting you to learn some of those skills that he had? He did, yeah. Dad suggested that I could potentially do a plumbing trade when I was younger. He was like, oh, you can take over the business. And, but, yeah, no, I wasn't, I was never really. Look, I actually went to a job site with him once and I saw him clear a block sewer. And that was, that was it for me. I was like, no, that's not really, I'm not into that. When you were a little kid, Ben, how much energy did you have? A lot of energy. Yeah, I think like lots of young boys, you know, lots of energy. I've got two year old twin boys and they are just rockets. They bolt around and I reckon potentially I would have been diagnosed with ADHD, maybe. Yeah, just really curious. And, you know, like just digging holes and running around on bikes and just, yeah, Mum actually always used to say that I had, I had two modes, either it was full throttle or just completely exhausted and on the lounge, not moving. What was the rule that your mum had for you when you wanted to try something new? The rule was because I wanted to try every sport and every activity available, like art activities and everything. I wanted to do everything. Mum's rule was that I had to ask three times before she'd allow me to explore it.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

That sounds like something out of a fairy tale,  
like you've got to ask the genie, the three wishes,  
the three times and then she might grant it.  
To be honest, I think it's probably more  
of a time management thing, you know.  
Fair enough.  
Yeah, if I was to try every single thing I asked her,  
then there wouldn't have been time for anything.  
How did drumming become something you wanted to try?  
I saw the school drummer in primary school  
and I remember the moment so clearly.  
I was in the hall where they used to play  
and they were doing a performance  
and I'd seen the school band play a couple of times  
and this is in year three, I think I was eight.  
And I don't know, there was something about it  
that I was just drawn to.  
I just, I think we've all got that rhythmic thing  
built into us.  
I imagine maybe from the heartbeat  
when you're in the womb, you know,  
that you've just got this sort of  
dum-chicka-dum-chicka-bom-chicka-dum-chicka-bom.  
It's just kind of built into you.  
I just related to it, I loved it.  
I thought it was cool, you know.  
You always want to do the cool stuff as well  
when you're young.  
And yeah, went home, asked Mum,  
then times that by two more.  
And she, yeah, she got me a kit and some lessons  
and kicked off.  
Who was the drum teacher that your mum found for you?  
Oh, Mrs. Chaka, yeah.  
I have no idea when she found Mrs. Chaka.  
It was all very bizarre.  
She was like, to me as a young boy,  
she seemed like a little old lady.  
But at the time, like I was so keen to learn,  
like I was like, okay, I'm just gonna go with this.  
She was at her house in Newcastle.  
She had a little room full of doilies  
and full of ornaments and lots of dark timber.  
And in there was an architecture table.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

And that's where I learned the drums,  
tapping on an architecture table.  
What do you mean, not a drum kit?  
No, it wasn't a drum kit.  
A table, is that a tradition in drumming?  
Not sure, it was very confusing for me.  
You went in to learn the drums  
and she pointed towards a table.  
Yeah, she was like, let's tap away on this thing.  
And I was like, aren't we supposed to be playing drums?  
So it was, look, it was an interesting start.  
What kind of music were you playing with her?  
The samba was the one that always stuck out to me.  
The da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da, da.  
Like, you know, that's stuck with me forever.  
It's not very rock and roll though.  
No, it is not rock and roll.  
And she would accompany me playing the flute.  
The flute, even better.  
Yeah, so she was quite a,  
she was quite a mean flute player.  
But apparently she played drums as well in a community band.  
So she was very musical, but it was an odd way to start.  
I think that's probably had a deep and lasting influence  
on your drumming career  
that we might need a whole nother outer unpick.  
Well, to be honest with you,  
some of the stuff she taught me,  
probably because it wasn't straight rock and roll, right?  
It wasn't just like,  
it was like this more kind of syncopated kind of rhythms.  
Like, you know, that's probably a great way to start.  
You did then start playing with the primary school band as well.  
How loud were you allowed to play?  
Could you give it everything?  
Yeah, well, it really depended on the conductor.  
The first conductor I had to burn,  
he was very encouraging and he was like louder, play louder,  
which I loved because I think most drummers  
enjoy playing loud or just laying into it.  
It's just fun to lay into a drum kit.  
Your first big break as a drummer wasn't with Silverchair.  
It was with the marching koalas.  
Yes. What is this?

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

The marching koalas is a marching band out of Newcastle.  
Was it a uniform?  
What did you have to wear as a marching koala?  
No, it was a proper, like, imagine,  
imagine like an American marching band on a football field,  
like doing kind of rehearsed moves, you know?  
It was kind of like that, you know?  
You learned your songs,  
but then you had to kind of like move in a certain way.  
And I played the quads.  
They're like toms, but you had four and they're on this brace.  
Was there a hat?  
There was a hat.  
There was a hat. It felt slightly military.  
It was through the marching koalas  
that you encountered another drum teacher.  
Yeah, Mr. Crone and I, Peter Crone,  
and he was probably one of my favourite drum teachers.  
He was so generous with his time and it was lovely to sit at a drum kit.  
It's a step up?  
Yeah, it's definitely a step up from an architecture table,  
a draftsman table, whatever it was.  
But yeah, he just taught me rather than the kind of the samba  
and the syncopated stuff that I was learning.  
It taught me a lot of notation and how to use it around the kit.  
But he also taught me how to forget what you've learned,  
which is something that I've really held on to, like for drummers.  
Like sometimes it can get very mathematical and tricky.  
But the way I like to play is to...  
I use all those things as like that's your tool belt, you know,  
they're all your tools to be able to build the house  
or whatever it is you want to build.  
But when it comes to the time of creating a drum part or performing,  
you know, you have to take that off and it's just...  
It's full Monty, you've just got to go with what you know and it's all instinct.  
So there's the school band, there's the marching koalas,  
but the real joy was playing music with friends, you know,  
on your own turf in your own way.  
You and Daniel Johns had met back in primary school in grade three.  
Friendships can happen so quickly when you're that age.  
Is that what happened between you and Dan?  
Yeah, 100%.  
I think there was just an instant connection.  
We just kind of got each other.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

It's a gut feeling.

You don't really have the emotional tools and all the mental tools to be able to go, do I like this person or not?

It's just all gut feeling if you like them.

And we just really liked being together and spending time together.

And I do remember playing a lot of football.

We go down to like the local oval and play touch football.

And he'd come to my house and we'd play a lot of cricket in the backyard.

And he did stay over a lot at my house when we were kids.

And around that time, we were both already interested in music and we'd sit up and watch Rage.

And I had a ghetto blaster in my room and played a lot of tapes.

But it was probably dad's vinyl was the crown jewel in the musical discovery.

Dad had a really impressive vinyl collection.

And because dad was so passionate about music and good music, too, I was really lucky that he had, I think he just had good taste in music.

The standout for me was Led Zeppelin,

which he kind of peppered to me for a long time

before I was old enough to really appreciate it.

But once, yeah, once that penny dropped just how good and how amazing Led Zeppelin are or were, then that was all over.

Like I just I became quite obsessed.

And once you decided want to just start playing together, how did you get your own drama kit?

I guess I was playing drums before Daniel and I, I guess, became a duo.

And the first kit came from a gentleman that lived probably 30 metres from us.

And he was just a family friend.

Mum obviously knew that he played drums.

He had another spare kit that he didn't really use.

It was collecting dust.

I remember the room it was in.

It looked like an outhouse toilet, but it was inside.

And above that toilet was like this, you know, pine kind of shelf.

And I was just sitting up there collecting dust and Mum bought it for like 70 bucks.

But it wasn't a full kit.

It needed a few extra bits and pieces.

So, you know, my first kit probably costs like 150 bucks, a couple of hundred bucks.

And once you started playing with Dan and then your friend, Chris Jonu, who came on board too, where did you practice?

We started in the Gillies, my parents' dining room, actually.

Yeah, we just kind of took it over.

Why did your mum and dad think about that?

They were incredibly supportive, you know, they just let us go for it.

I think mum and dad always had, they had this really good balance

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

of just letting us be kids and teenagers, you know,  
and if that meant taking over the living room and having band rehearsal,  
like they just let us go for it.  
In hindsight, looking back, it's incredibly generous.  
You know, this is their home and my, you know, my sister was there as well.  
So she was very patient with us as well.  
And you were playing gigs and entering talent quests from really early on.  
Whose idea was that?  
It was our idea.  
Yeah, we were just looking to play anywhere.  
I think we, we had all this energy and rehearsed songs  
and we had some early originals and yeah, we obviously played a lot of covers  
and Friday afternoon was always band practice day.  
And I'd always get so excited for Fridays because I knew band practice was coming.  
But, you know, we didn't really know what we were rehearsing for  
or doing these originals for.  
So I think we just needed to focus that energy somewhere, you know,  
and obviously as a band, that's what you do.  
You rehearse and you play shows or you record or whatever it is.  
So where were you playing shows at 13, 14?  
It was a mixture of talent quests  
because obviously we could go in those, there was no real age restriction  
and then some band comps and a couple of pubs.  
But they were used because we were so young, we were underage.  
We were 13, I think at that point.  
You know, there was some rules around that we had to have chaperones  
and we weren't allowed to leave the band rooms.  
We could just walk on stage, perform and walk off  
that we weren't allowed into the venue.  
So yeah, it was just anywhere and everywhere.  
Yeah, we were very ambitious.  
I've got memories of spending time with Daniel  
at his parents' house and my house.  
And we'd kind of pump each other up and get really excited about  
how great we're going to be and how big we're going to be.  
And when we were like 13, we'd always say,  
oh, can you imagine how amazing we're going to be when we're 18?  
So we get and, you know, we'd always say,  
we're going to be the biggest band and the greatest live band.  
And we're going to be this and that, you know, and we just fantasise  
about all this amazing stuff that we're going to do.  
But never in your wildest dreams do you actually think  
you're going to have the opportunity to do that.  
You found out about a competition

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

where the prize was recording a single and making a video.  
Tell me about tomorrow, the song that you entered and won with.  
Tell me about creating that song.  
How did it happen and where?  
Yeah, so tomorrow was created in my childhood bedroom.  
So we'd moved from the living room to the bedroom.  
Was that a demotion or were you?  
It was a demotion because the bedroom was tiny.  
It made no sense.  
We were quite structured the way we the way we worked.  
Even back then, like, you know, you learn your part,  
rehearse the song, you know, get it tightened it up.  
But when we moved to my bedroom, when it was just Daniel and Chris and I,  
we decided we'll just try some jamming.  
Maybe we were inspired by, like, some of the 70s bands that we loved.  
You know, they'd just get on stage and you'd watch them just kind of  
almost waffle on for like, you know, half an hour, you know.  
So we thought, well, let's just try some jamming.  
Let's just get in the room.  
We were confident enough and maybe accomplished enough  
to just play what we felt and just instinctually play and feed off each other.  
It's fantastic.  
It's like you're having this musical conversation,  
but at the same time, it's quite meditative.  
You kind of let go of everything and you're really in the moment.  
And to do that with friends like your best friends, it's an awesome feeling.  
But yeah, that's how tomorrow emerged.  
So it was during it's just during a jam.  
We were just kind of playing who knows what we were playing  
and who knows how we arrived at that point.  
But the three of us just launched into the chorus of tomorrow.  
And then Daniels just started singing the melody.  
My guess is that we probably loved it so much that we played.  
We probably played it for like five or ten minutes just over and over and over again,  
because that's what you do as excited teenagers.  
You just you repeat.  
And then I called Daniel afterwards and I said,  
hey, that thing that we did at the jam, I think we should turn that into a song.  
And then eventually I think it may have may have even been one day before school.  
He just came around and we both jumped on acoustic guitars  
and just kind of mapped it out.  
We added a couple of extra sections and that was it.  
And then we rehearsed it up and the the the initial  
version of tomorrow, I think was like six and a half minutes long.



## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

Because of because of those seven is bands, you know, it was our rock odyssey.  
But yeah, so it was all it was all very instinctual.

We just thought it was another song.

You know, I don't you know, you couldn't you couldn't possibly know  
that a song that you create in your bedroom with a couple of mates  
is going to completely change your life.

Well, I think you were playing that one night at a suburban tavern  
in Newcastle called the Jules Tavern. Yeah.

And and who was there watching?

The Jules Tavern gig was after the tomorrow film Clipperdead on SBS.

And we were getting some interest from some record companies.

And we called them the two Johns was John Watson and John O'Donnell.

John Watson went on to become a manager.

It was the gig, the first gig that they'd ever seen us play.

And it was we couldn't play in the the main band room.

So the venue had set up some milk crates with a piece of ply on top.

And with the three of us was crammed onto this tiny little stage.

I mean, the symbols must have been right next to Chris and Daniel's heads  
and just absolutely tearing them apart.

What impression did you make from your little plywood stage on the milk crates?

What did they say to you later about what they saw that night?

They didn't really give too much away on the night, maybe because we were.

Like just unaware teenagers, you know, it's just another gig.

There's just another couple of guys coming to check us out, you know,  
maybe now if it was to happen, you'd be more aware and like, oh, this gig's a big deal.

But to us, it was just another gig.

But later on, they did they did fill us in that they walked away from it,  
saying like that doesn't happen every day.

You don't see bands like that every day, particularly when they're 14 years old  
and just how extraordinary the moment was for them.

Basically, they decided on the drive home like we have to sign these guys.

Having their kids sign a record deal with this huge company  
must have been pretty surreal for your parents and Chris's and Dan's parents.

Were they there when you signed the contract?

Yeah, they were. Yeah, we were all there.

We were all there at the Sony offices in Darlinghurst, I think at the time.

Yeah, it was a big it was a big day.

Each family got a sweet and nervous part of that deal.

White goods. Yeah.

What parent could say no?

Yeah, totally.

That we wouldn't have done the deal if it wasn't for the white goods.

What did your family pick?

Mom and dad decided to get another television as you do,

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

because you can never have too many televisions in a household, especially if there's arguments about what we're watching. So their son got a record deal and they got an extra TV. Yeah, looking back, that's so funny. The boys are going to sign this record deal, but in order for it to go down. I'm joking, by the way, it wasn't the deal breaker. I don't know. Don't ruin a good story. So when you were just 15, your first album, Frog Stomp, was released. And what do you remember about hearing your music on the radio at that time when that album started getting airplay? What was that like? It was really exciting. Yeah, it was real. It's really exciting to hear your music over a radio. But I guess for us, because we were living it and experiencing it, it was completely normal, like that maybe the first couple of times was like really exciting, like, wow, cool, our music's on the radio. But then it just becomes like, cool. That's just part of what we're doing. It's part of this thing that we've we've created. And it just kind of normalizes it. The album went to number one in Australia and New Zealand. It made the US top 10. How were the adults around you reacting? I mean, for me, mum and dad were just your mum and dad. They're not going to change. Oh, watching the new TV. That's right. I think I actually think it went into dads. We call it the dungeon. So, you know, he was enjoying that. But. We were really lucky with the people that we had around us. You know, they didn't treat us any differently. Also, because we were just teenagers, teenagers from Newcastle that still went to school and still that we did have a grant, a really grounding factor around us. And I think a lot of that was by design, you know, I think our parents had a lot to do with that, making sure that we did have some kind of normality. We were ultimately living two lives. There was this kind of normal at home blue collar, newie, simple life. But then we'd go off and do this extraordinary stuff. Recording, making music, touring, travelling the world. But I do think the stuff at home definitely helped just help keep us grounded. The fact that you still had to go to school

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

as the album was becoming such a huge hit.

I mean, did that fill out rages to you, Ben?

I mean, I find it hard to get my teenagers to go to school and they are not international rock stars.

So, like, did you push back?

No, I just accepted go to go to school.

And I don't I actually think what you don't realise later in life is the one cool thing about school is that basically you're going and hanging out with friends every day.

There's the academic part of it, but you don't get that opportunity just to kind of go and hang out with your friends every single day as you get older.

And there are still, you know, I've probably got four or five of those guys that I'm still really, really close to outside the friendship of Daniel and Chris, though those friendships to me were also very, very important because they knew us before the band. You know, they just looked at us as their mates.

What role did your parents take on in terms of the business side of Silverchair back in the early days?

Yeah, they were really active and they had to be because, you know, I think there was a lot of complexities going on that we there's no way we could have navigated ourselves like we just we were just too young.

They were running the fan club.

They did. Yeah, they ran the fan club, the Lama Appreciation Society.

Look, they were great.

They were very passionate about it.

And they and even to this day, like people that were members because everyone had a member number, the die hard fans were quote what LAS, we call it the LAS.

They would quote what LAS member number they are still now.

Huge excitement among teenage girls who I think teenage girls are responsible for so many great rock bands, really.

I mean, all credit to teenage girls.

How would your mum react when they'd call your house?

Excited fans would call your house.

Well, mum was I mean, mum was a straight shooter and she was tough as nails most of the time.

She was still human and she had a six sense of humour.

She had a dark sense of humour.

So what she would do is she we had a core ID machine.

This is before mobiles, maybe the early stages of mobile phones.

But because of dad's plumbing business, you know, we had to have a public facing kind of advertising and they quickly

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

find out like Ben's dad is a plumber.

So it wasn't hard to find Gillies plumbing in the yellow pages.

So we'd have fans calling the house at all hours of the morning.

So what mum would do if we got to call it like two or three a.m.

and woke her up and there was giggling girls on the other side of the line,

she would write down the number and then maybe a few days later,

she would set an alarm for two or three or four in the morning,

call the number and ask to speak to the parents

and then say basically like just so you know,

your children are calling my home at these ridiculous hours.

But the part that I completely forgot, actually, my sister reminded me of this.

She said, oh, yeah, mum, mum would do weird shit like bark, bark down the phone.

You imagine that two in the morning.

I just love the commitment to herself to like wake herself up against

the alarm to have another night of disrupted sleep just to get that vengeance.

That's commitment. Yeah.

And I don't know, like maybe just to call during the day and just say,

hey, just letting you know this is happening.

It's a little bit inconvenient.

But no, it's like, no, I want to I want to repay some of this.

This is Conversations with Sarah Kanoski.

Silverchair headed off on tour to the States on the success of

Frogstop on your first album.

What stands out when you think back to that trip, Ben?

I look at it's all a bit of a blur, like it was all

those first few years of the band, like it was pretty intense.

There was lots of touring, lots of rehearsing, lots of just press.

Like it was it was a lot, but I think we handled it pretty well,

but it definitely does just all blur into one.

It's almost like just one big gig.

Anyway, I do remember it was in Atlanta

the very first time we played in the US and like there was, I don't know,

there was like a crazy line around the block for people wanting to get in.

And there was just this energy and excitement.

And you could tell that people were just excited about the band

and just like where these guys come from.

And that was a really cool energy to experience.

That's for sure.

You were in those early days, just three teenage mates

who were suddenly on this incredible ride together.

How much fun did you have off stage?

The early days were so fun.

We had so much fun on tour.

Like we were just teenage boys still playing on stage

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

like we were at the Jolly Roger at the bandcom, but to slightly larger audiences. But still at the core was the three of us playing music together. And that's I mean, and to me, that's what I always chased in Silverchair because I always felt like the magic was when Chris and Daniel and I played together. That's what made Silverchair so special.

Did you feel like kids still or were you suddenly kind of grown ups?  
Probably a bit of both.

We were forced to grow up quickly, but at the same time, you know, we were three mates. So I think we lent on each other a lot, you know, and that's why bands work, I think, because you do have that you have the camaraderie within the band, but you also have an inbuilt support system between the guys in the band. And I think Chris and Daniel and I, we always had each other to lean on. But, yeah, at that point, we were still, yeah, we were still teenagers, just being idiots or having we had lots of stupid in jokes that we thought were absolutely hilarious, that no one else really understood.

Were you getting better as a drummer, too?  
Like, did you feel you were developing your skills as a musician?  
Because suddenly you're playing these massive audiences.  
It's not like you've got a huge runway to develop.  
Yeah, definitely.

I think, well, there's a few things to that.  
I think, firstly, as a musician, as I started at eight, but the band became successful at 14, you do just naturally have so much headroom to improve anyway, but what Silverchair also had, we were forced to perform at a certain level of professionalism. And that also makes you a better player and a better musician and a better performer. And also, you're curious, you know, you want to kind of discover your instrument more and see what else you can do with it. And all three of us were kind of having those journeys individually and together as a band.

And I think that's why Silverchair, you know, we were always needing to progress. Because if we got stuck and just did the same thing, you know, that we did on FrogSom, my guess is we just would have gotten bored.

In terms of a live band, I guess the drummer has a really interesting point of view. You know, you're kind of sitting a little bit back.  
You can survey what's going on.  
You've got your two bandmates in front of you.  
What was it like for you from your point of view behind that drum kit?  
I always felt like, and this is true to most bands, I think that are kind of predominantly a rock band. The drummer is kind of like, you're kind of the engine room, you know, you got to hold it down so everyone else can kind of lock in with what you're doing. So I felt like a sense of responsibility to keep it really solid.  
So then Chris can lock in with me, he and I are locking in together.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

And then Daniel can put the tinsily stuff on top, you know, it's kind of, I look at it as like a football team, you know, like Chris and I were the front rowers and Dan was like the halfback.

But together, you know, it's the alchemy that makes that magic.

How quickly Ben did drinking become a part of life with the band?

Really early on, to be honest.

I remember drinking quite regularly on tour when I was about 16.

It's available, you know, it's there.

I was it was there even earlier, but I guess we just didn't show any interest in it.

We were too busy just running around, being silly, but, you know, also very focused on the shows and what what the job was.

But yeah, I remember coming off a tour when I was about 16 and thinking, wow, I almost drank every night, even if it was like one or two beers, but just becoming a regular thing.

But never it never got out of hand.

But, you know, that's that's still you've got a developing mind.

Your brain is still developing at that age.

So in hindsight, like that's still a lot.

As things went on and you got older, your mum stepped in a few times to try to get things under control when you were back home in Newcastle. Yeah.

How did that play out?

Oh, look, I think, you know, none of us like being told what to do, particularly as a teenager.

You don't you don't want to hear it.

Whatever you tell me not to do, that's the exact thing I want to do.

But yeah, mum tried her hardest to rein me in.

But ultimately, I I needed to discover for myself, you know, I had to make mistakes myself.

That's one of those things that maybe dad didn't even realise he was handing down some wisdom.

But he did say to me once, like, you can't put an old head on young shoulders.

And it's so true, like you do understand as you grow up stuff that works and doesn't work.

And you can try and pass that down to people that are younger than you.

Sometimes they'll listen, but some a lot of the time they have to discover it and find out themselves.

And sometimes that's the hard way as well.

You said that when it started out, those first years of making music and playing live was just so much fun.

But as time went on, was it as fun as it had been?

It always was fun when Daniel and Chris and I played music together.

That's always what I was chasing was the music and those magical moments that we shared.

One thing that our manager said to us, John, was that you guys don't understand

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

the magic that you guys share together.

And you won't understand it until you play with other musicians.

And, like, a lot of times our manager was right a lot of the time, most of the time.

And it wasn't later on until I started playing with other musicians.

Like, although I enjoyed it, it just didn't have that same specialness as when Chris and Daniel and I played music together.

You had some amazing gigs along the way.

You were huge in Brazil, Silverchair, and you played at Rock in Rio, the world's largest rock festival, to something like a quarter of a million people.

What on earth is that like?

What can you even see?

It's quite mind boggling.

I mean, you're aware that you're just about to walk on stage to a quarter of a million people.

But it really isn't until you walk out in front of an audience like that that you realise just the enormity of it.

Even to this day, it's probably the most incredible gig that I've ever seen.

And played and we knocked it out of the park, too.

We just had a really, really good gig.

But yeah, it's just that amount of people in one location.

It's like they start moving as one.

You know, they start kind of, it looks like an ocean.

It's really, it's so incredible.

One thing I always thought to myself is there's two things, actually.

One is, like, if you're at the back, like, what's your view like?

You're watching a couple of matchsticks on stage.

You don't get to really see much.

But also, like, if you're in the middle of that crowd and you need to go to the bathroom, like, what do you do?

These are two genuine questions for all concert goers.

That's an hour turnaround.

The little I'll see is the guys are pit in front of me and I'll need to really go to the loo and I won't be able to.

That's right. You just got to hold it.

Silverchair took a few breaks over the years.

And then in 2011, you played your last gig together.

Did you know at the time this this is it?

No, I guess we've had the the whispers of the band breaking up several times throughout our career, always from Daniel.

He was always kind of doubted whether he wanted to continue with the band.

And then generally something happened and it reminded him and or reminded all of us just how much we love the band and love that feeling of playing together.

But I guess there was just there definitely was a different feeling on that tour that something was something was breaking down and something was a bit off.



## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

Like, I really put my finger on it, but it was I think we were all feeling a bit uneasy. And it maybe just a little bit unhappy with where we were. And a lot of it had to do with the drinking culture, you know, that had been in the band for a long time. But I guess it was it was really heightened at that point. But yeah, I didn't know it was the end. And technically, technically, we're still in indefinite hibernation. The band hasn't actually officially come out and said, hey, it's all over. So which I still find quite funny, really. Well, even if it is only a temporary hibernation, I guess it must have felt like not only were you stepping away from this band that was such a big part of your life and your identity, but also your friendships losing these two closest people to you in lots of ways. How hard was that at the time? It was really stressful. And what made it even more stressful is the fact that there was no conversations about it. You know, we did the three of us didn't sit down and have a conversation. There was just no definitive conversations where any of us said to each other, I don't want to do this band anymore. I don't want to be in this band anymore. It was all kind of relayed through our manager. So I was under the impression that we just needed some time apart. Sounds like a bad breakup, bad romantic breakup where you're like, is this over? Hoping maybe it's just temporary and time goes on. And yeah, well, it kind of was. Yeah, but the frustrating thing, which I think particularly Chris and I struggle with for so long is that, you know, we never had that clear closure. And I think that's what we were looking for, just to have a clear conversation with the three of us where we all agreed like, yeah, look, maybe maybe it's time and let's call it a day. But that just that conversation never happened. So it was just left in the ether. And, you know, Chris and I did try to communicate with Dan over the years to rekindle some kind of friendship. Or, you know, open some lines of communication. But even then, it's just sometimes it's hard when there's so much history. It's hard to know where to start. How did you and your wife, Jackie, first meet? Jackie and I met in TAFE. So our record company, Merma, funded a TAFE course that would make up part of our Year 12 credits, I guess.



## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

What was the TAFE course in?

Oh, it was Music Industry Skills.

Yeah, so maybe it's your second chance at plumbing or something.

Yeah, no, it was Music Industry Skills and we learned all kinds of stuff about like putting on festivals and how to play in front of a quarter of a million people that probably wasn't on the radar.

No, that wasn't on the radar.

But look, it was, you know, it was good fun and it allowed us to be on tour.

And we could do the course while we were touring.

So the TAFE ran the course and Jackie had to try out for it.

She tried out for it by singing Tina Turner's Simply the Best.

That's starting with a bang.

Yeah, it's a good start.

Well, I got her in the course, so it was a winner.

So how did you reconnect after that initial time at Newcastle TAFE?

It was about 14 or 15 years later and we seriously didn't have any contact.

I did not see her for that entire time.

And I just went to this random party that my friends were going to in Bondi.

And yeah, she was just there.

And I recognised her straight away.

And I went up to her and I was like, hey, you're that girl I remember from TAFE.

And I said, I said, I can't remember your name.

And she's like, I'm Jackie.

And I was like, oh, yeah, yeah.

Anyway, we just we just started chatting and I actually recognised her walk of all things.

I don't know. We've all got our walk, right?

I recognised her walk funnily enough.

I don't know.

We just kind of connected and stayed in touch and started spending some time together in Newcastle and and it wasn't romantic.

We were kind of friends, you know?

And then we'd been away together a couple of times.

But this one time we were going away for a week somewhere and I spoke to one of my best mates and he was like, right.

So you're this girl that you've been spending all this time with.

You're going away for a week with her up to this lovely place.

I'm with you, mate.

Yeah. And you reckon nothing's going to happen?

And I was like, no, man, no, no, no, we're just friends.

It's all good.

No, no, nothing's happening.

Anyway, we kissed for the first time.

I think we got engaged two days later and we were married two months later.

Felt like it was faded in some way between you.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

Yeah, it does. Yeah.

I mean, I do remember her and Tave.

She was that like staunch, strong willed, Croatian girl, you know, just said exactly what she had on her mind and she's still she's still that person.

What did Jackie say about your drinking, Ben?

Because it had been such a big part of your life for so long.

What did it lead to between you and Jackie?

How did that come to a head?

Basically, I could feel our relationship breaking down and not just the relationship with Jackie, but all of my relationships felt like they were suffering because of drinking.

My drinking had really escalated and I was hiding drinks.

And I also couldn't just have like a social drink like I'd used to be able to.

I couldn't just have one.

It was either zero or absolutely smashed out of my mind.

And yeah, it was definitely creating some tension in mine and Jackie's relationship.

And, you know, we went and saw a counselor about it.

And his suggestion was maybe try changing the dials a bit, have some rules around it.

And we tried that and it was just that didn't work.

And Jackie was kind.

She basically said to me, like, look, you either need to stop this or this isn't going to last.

It's all or nothing.

So it has to be nothing.

Otherwise, I'm going to lose my marriage and probably a lot of other important relationships in my life.

So I stopped.

I can't say that has been a perfect journey either.

Like I've had a couple of times when I've fallen off the wagon.

But they've only been like little bumps in the road a few moments when I've just given into temptation and had a drink and just gotten really smashed and probably like half a dozen times over the last eight years or something.

And I always feel really guilty about it.

But, you know, all in all, I've been sober and

not drinking has given me a clarity that, you know, I haven't had or I didn't have since I was that I started that kind of regular drinking on tour.

There's a clarity like, you know, kids must have it up to their life.

But once they start drinking, like,

it's just you just so clear you wake up in the morning because even when you have like one or two wines, like, you know, a lot of people do that and that's fine.

And I don't judge.

I've done plenty of stuff for my time.

I don't judge anyone for anything.

But even that one or two wines, I can recollect that it just gave you this slight little fog in the morning.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

But when you go zero, like, yeah, it changed my life.

It gave me a clarity that was just incredibly refreshing, but also saved my marriage, saved probably a lot of friendships.

Yeah, changed my life.

Alcohol can take so much from people.

It's really it's really good to hear what being sober can bring back.

Yeah, I kind of one of the biggest adjustments.

And I know people will relate to this is you get

when you go out and you have a couple of drinks, you get that little twilight.

It gives you that confidence.

You know, I think for some people, like if you're an anxious person or if you're a nervous person around crowds or people or whatever, you have a couple of drinks and you're confident and you go out in your chat.

The biggest adjustment for me was social, the social adjustment was to go out with people and if they were drinking too, like,

how do I how do I interact in these situations?

What have you learned?

Give me your secrets, Ben.

How do you socialize?

One of the secrets is you probably won't stay out as late because you get really bored really quickly drunk when you are sober and everyone around you is drunk.

You get so bored and then you get to drive yourself home.

Yeah, you drive home and then you wake up the next day like raring to go.

Yeah, I actually get quite a bit of joy.

Like in I do find it very funny when I wake up and other people are really hung over and I'm like bouncing off the walls going like, right, what are we doing?

It was like, Ben, please, no, stop.

But look, I dare someone I dare you to try a week, just try one week with zero booze and just see what it does.

But for me, I found six six months was that was the magic moment when you just get this clearness in your mind that you haven't had for probably a long time.

I think, though, as you said, people can be scared of what will rear its head without the alcohol to kind of press it down because, of course, alcohol is self medication for lots of people.

And when you stop that, you might have to face some of the stuff you haven't wanted to.

Like, has that been a challenging part for you beyond the socialization and stuff?

Yeah, 100 percent.

Yeah, I think the alcohol for me became a self medication for anxiety.

Yeah, so I had an experience with hydroponic marijuana when I was about 20.

It's called a drug induced psychotic episode.

So it just happens really quickly, but it's scary as hell.

And that bubbled over some anxiety, underlying, underlying anxiety, which I think I always had, but it just I hadn't been aware of it.

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

And the drinking definitely helped take that away.  
But the dark side of that is when you're not drinking and then you hang it hung over, like it's almost like the anxiety is times 10.  
It makes it even worse.  
So.  
Facing those fears.  
It's like there's a gift on the other side of it.  
If you face them, there's always a gift.  
It's scary for a second.  
Then once you kind of get over it, you kind of, oh, what was I so scared of?  
As you said, you are a dad now to twin boys.  
You and Jackie have twin boys.  
Can home life be as chaotic as things were on tour?  
Home life is different.  
But the chaos is is real.  
Our house is just bedlam.  
But I love it.  
I absolutely love it.  
Like I love my boys.  
It's a love that, you know, most of my life, I haven't been a parent.  
So I know what it feels like not to have kids.  
You know, parents, some parents pull out photos of their kids.  
You want to see my kids?  
It's like, you know, they're going, I don't want to see your bloody kids.  
It doesn't interest me.  
But when when you have children, you just have this penny drop moment where you go, oh, my God, I love these human beings more than life itself, more than anything in the entire universe.  
You know, they just it's you cannot explain it until you experience it.  
How's having kids made you reflect on your own parents?  
Do you see them a bit differently?  
Oh, yeah, 100 percent.  
I actually had a really good friend of mine.  
We were having this conversation and he said that he asked his parents, do you love me in his 40, he said, do you love me as much now as you did when I was a baby like his children?  
And I like, yeah, yeah, definitely.  
That's that's how much we love you.  
And when we were having this conversation, you just say, oh, my God, like, that's how my parents felt about me.  
But you just you just can't comprehend it when you don't have your own.  
You just cannot comprehend how much they actually love you.  
And it's the most it's the most joyous and wonderful thing that you could ever

## [Transcript] Conversations / Silverchair's drummer grows up

experience like all the band stuff, you know, the silver chair experience, you know, with two of my best mates, that's incredible.

But if I had to choose, my boys win every time, every single time.

They are the greatest.

I look at them every day and just go, you just come here and give me a cuddle because I can't tell you how much that you make my hustling.

What will you say to them, Ben, when they're old enough to ask about silver chair?

What will you say to them about your years in silver chair?

I think I'll just tell them that about the amazing experience I had with two great friends doing something that we were.

And I still are incredibly passionate about and maybe encourage them to chase their dreams and you never know what can happen.

And it's been really great to talk to you.

Thank you so much for being my guest on Conversations.

Thank you for having me.

It's been lovely.

You've been listening to a podcast of Conversations with Sarah Kanoski.

For more Conversations interviews, head to the website, [abc.net.au slash conversations](http://abc.net.au/conversations).