

INTERVIEW

TRAN SFOR MING LIVES

A STORY OF OVERCOMING CHALLENGES, CHANGING YOUR MINDSET,
AND HELPING OTHERS. ONE INSPIRATIONAL FATHER TELLS HIS STORY...
BY CORRINE BARRACLOUGH



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PETER Di Prinzio's life story is nothing short of incredible. He was born into a traditional Italian family in Newcastle, Australia and now, having cleared a huge amount of hurdles, he's an inspirational speaker.

He's challenged and beaten adversity not just once, but seven times. To name just a few, he's overcome bullying, wrongful imprisonment, poverty, divorce, depression, mental health challenges, and being alienated from his daughter.

And that is what Penthouse wanted to speak to him about.

How does a man cope when his only daughter is kidnapped by the mother and all contact denied? What does that do to someone's mental health, sense of self, will to live, and self-esteem? And, how on earth does someone find the strength to channel all of that to help others?

Penthouse sat down with Peter to ask all that and more...

Peter, thanks so much for speaking to us. I hear that you've hired a private investigator to track down your daughter?

Yes, I'm talking to a solicitor. We also have engaged a private investigator. We have found a lot of information.

Give me the background, tell me about your daughter...

I have a massive story behind me, I guess that's why I'm now an inspirational speaker! I met my ex in 1998, when I moved Newcastle to Sydney. We eventually got married, two and a half years later and were together for just under 10 years. My daughter was born in 2004. I already had a son, from a previous relationship, he was much older, I've always had a good relationship with him.

So, you bonded with your daughter in the same way?

When my daughter was born, she was the daughter that every dad wants. I was very close to her and she was very close with me. She was only young when we were last hanging out together but she spent a lot of time with me. I even took her to work meetings with me if I knew the client. She loved being outdoors. I have an Italian background; she was very tanned and loved

the sun. I used to take her everywhere, she had a big million-dollar smile. We lived along the water so I'd take her for lots of walks.

When did things start to go wrong in your relationship?

It was 2006/2007 things when I first noticed things weren't right. You get a feeling, you just know when something's not quite right. There was the pressure of living, like most couples have. We'd just bought a property, which was over a million dollars, so a lot of pressure there. I was working hard, and she wasn't working for a while. There was one particular night that sticks in my mind. I'd recently got her a job in banking industry. She'd started working and they had their Christmas party on.

Did you go to the party together?

No, that was the thing. She said it was no partners. I knew that wasn't the way the organisation worked.

What did you say?

I let it go. I stayed home and was looking after my daughter. She left at 7pm and didn't get home until 4am. She drove there, so I knew it wasn't because she'd been drinking. She arrived home, had a shower and went to bed. The next morning, she was very stand offish and distant. I could see there was something wrong with her. She kept going to the toilet, kept being sick. It wasn't until further down the road, I realised it was guilt. The guilt of coming home to her husband, and her daughter and the thought of where she'd been out until 4am, made her physically sick.

Did you challenge her and ask her what was going on?

I didn't have time to; very soon after she asked if I could leave and move in with a friend.

What was her explanation?

She said she needed time to think.

Do you remember that day?

Yes. It was February 2008. That day, she told me that she loved me but wasn't in love with me. She said she was going to arrange divorce papers.

How did you react to that?

I told here that I knew the financial burden

a separation could take. So I said, 'Let's make a private arrangement, let's do a deal, we'll sell the house, pay back the bank, you can have what's left, and I can see my daughter once a fortnight.'

And that's what you did?

Yes. For a few months it was ok. But sometimes when she'd come to pick up our daughter I noticed marks on her neck. I won't go into detail, but I knew she'd been with a man. The guy turned out to be her boss.

Did you have the agreement in writing?

No, and I regret that now. When I look back I wish I had. But, at the time, I thought we'd been together for 10 years and there was trust there.

But there wasn't trust, was there?

No. One weekend, I turned up and no one was around. I waited 20 minutes, then the next door neighbour came out and said, 'who are you looking for?' I said I was looking for my daughter and her mother. I was told they'd gone.

Just like that? That's how you found out?

Yes. I was told they'd left.

And when was that, Peter?

That was 13 years ago.

And you haven't seen your daughter in all those years?

No. I haven't seen her. I haven't heard from her. I heard rumours she was here or there, but I didn't know if they were true. I heard she went interstate. I don't believe they went overseas. I know she's back in Sydney now.

Looking back now can you see signs you missed at the time?

Hey, listen, we weren't perfect. But I wasn't a drinker, I wasn't a gambler, I didn't leave her alone to go out or anything.

Can you tell me how that's impacted your mental health?

In March 2008, and I've had a lot of men reach out to me after I first talked about this, I couldn't cope anymore. I didn't want to work. I went to that dark place. I drove my car out west to St Mary's I parked my car. I wrote a suicide note, I wrote to my daughter and I tried to overdose.

This's all part of your inspirational talk?

Yes, I live stream events. It's become my purpose to share my experience. I believe in God, and it's strange because I took at those tablets, and my specialist said when they found me and pumped my stomach, I should have died. My specialist said, 'Someone up there's looking out for you'. That's why I do what I do now.

You've found other men in similar positions – and a lack of support?

Absolutely. And covid lockdowns are adding extra strain. I'm hearing so many stories of men cut off from their kids and I know how that feels. I know what it's like to go to that dark place.

Can you explain how it feels?

You think it can't change. You react to that, and then your body reacts to that and everything shuts down. I teach people to respond not to react to circumstance. Respond don't react.

And you apply that to your daughter?

It's been 13 years since I saw my daughter. There's not a day that goes by that I don't think about her, birthdays, Christmas, Easter, Mother's Day, of course I think about her. Of course sometimes I cry, thinking about her.

There were no organisations that could help you?

I went to Dads in Distress, I was referred by one of the pastors at church. But he issue I had was this, I went and I had a lady, I started sharing my story, telling her how much I missed my daughter. She said, 'You've got to understand that daughters need their mothers'. I sat back and thought, 'What? Are you saying mums are more important than fathers?' I wasn't there saying I wanted full custody; I was saying I want to see my daughter. And your response to that is, 'You've got to understand that daughters need this mothers?'

What did you do?

I said, 'I'm sorry to waste your time' and I walked out. I'm not having a go at mothers; I'm asking that fathers be shown some respect too. This is why today we have such an issue with youth crime, and drugs, when parents split up, there's not a fatherly figure. There's no male role model to show them, to explain when they make the wrong choices. I deal with suicidal



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young people; I've spoken at schools and organisations. I know their problems, because they share them with me.

Tell me how other life experiences have influenced your thinking?

In 2014, I was diagnosed with terminal cancer. I was told how long I had to live. I was told I would never walk again. I had multiple myeloma, which is a blood cancer. The reason I'm alive today and I'm walking and cancer free, is because the night of 23 July 2014 when I was told, I thought, 'No, I'm not going to die, I need to see my daughter'. It was my reason to stay alive. **Your daughter was your purpose?** Yes! Everyone needs a purpose, a reason and your body then responds to that. It's the process of self-healing, it's why I'm still here after seven years.

Tell me the story about the lawyer who came to one of your talks in Sydney...

This was one of those incredible moments. When I did my last speaking event in Sydney, before COVID, there was a man in the audience

who emailed me three days afterwards. I received this email saying, 'Your event was amazing, it was life-changing, I'm a lawyer and I want to help you get your daughter back, free of charge. That's how this latest investigation all started. I know that at some point, I will be giving my talk, and my daughter will be sitting there in the audience, I just know it.'

You have such inner strength...

My story is intense, over years and years, I've been to hell and back. Now, I want to share my experience to help others. I want to teach others how to respond not react. I want to share my positive mindset.



THIS IS THE PROBLEM WE'VE GOT; NO POLITICIANS HAVE THE GUTS TO TACKLE THESE ISSUES

You must have moments of weakness?

Of course. Sometimes I cry, of course I do. Then I ask myself, what's the alternative? In 2008 I tried that alternative. I believe that God kept me alive to give others hope; even cancer patients, I give them hope. I can do that because I understand what it's like. When I tried to commit suicide, I know it got back to my ex, because we do have mutual friends, and they said to her, 'Don't you dare let him see her now, he's unstable.' That was never the case. At that point, my dad had just passed away from cancer. Everything around me was crumbling. Now I know that life will show things to you at certain times, and you either react or respond. I know I need to get out there and I need to share my story because it can save someone's life.

Your dad died from cancer and then you faced that diagnosis?

Yes. I overcame being told I was going to die from terminal cancer. You know, I took my dad to the hospital when he was diagnosed. He kept saying to me, 'I'm going to die, aren't

I? I kept saying to him, don't say that, but he was a typical Italian man. I know that I've saved lives through sharing my story. They've written to me and said, 'I was going to end my life, then after hearing you, I've started taking action to turn my life around'. That's what keeps me going.

So your daughter was 4-years-old when you last saw her?

Yes. She's now 17. It will be amazing to have her back in my life. It will happen.

Your social media is filled with positivity...

Sometimes, as you go through life, you go through challenges and sometimes you win, because you're able to share with others and help them get through it. Racism, getting bullied, I grew up with that. I'm here to tell you that no matter what happens in life, if you do not control circumstances around you, they will control you. When I tried to end my life, I had to change my attitude. Now, I control my circumstances, I don't let it get me down.

You've been doing your talk on zoom through COVID?

Yes, I've done schools, via zoom, all over the country. I recently did one in the US because they're going through tough times over there too.

Do you have times of feeling angry?

There are times when I did feel angry, but that's a reaction. If I get angry, it affects me, it builds up inside my body and it will affect my immune system. A large reason that people get sick is because something like stress or anger, has sat in their body, and it does so much damage to your body.

You see the connection between men who can't see their children and male suicide?

Yes I see it. Unfortunately, fathers who don't see their kids, they feel this incredible loss. Of course that's why there's so much male suicide.

What do you say to men who want to give up?

Things can change. You have to ride that wave; you can't drown, because then you'll never know what it's like to walk on the sand again.

Did you study before becoming an inspirational speaker?

No! I have nothing against these people who study, go to university, get loads of

qualifications, but they've never been in the trenches. When you write a suicide note, and you say to your family, 'I'm sorry', that's real. Within 15 minutes you feel the tingling in your body, you know you're about to go. I do so much with men in similar situations, with everything in life that they face.

Have you tried to speak to politicians about these issues?

Yes, but there's so much red tape. You can request to have a debate with a politician and they ask what your topics will be. When I tell them, they say they won't accept your offer. That's it! This is the problem we've got; no politicians have the guts to tackle these issues. When there's a place called Dads in Distress, and a woman talks to me and says you've got to understand, I'm sorry, why aren't you understanding me? Why aren't you hearing me? Unless the father is a drug dealer, a paedophile, unless he's abusive, why on earth are children allowed to be used in this way? Why are children being used as weapons? Why are our kids being used as shields?

And politicians won't fight?

Politicians are gutless on this issue, 100 per cent they are. I'm sorry, this is too important, I'm not going to be part of political correctness. I'm 59-years-old, I'm just saying that I have as much right to see my daughter as my ex wife. I'm not saying I want full custody, I'm just saying I want to be part of her life as her dad. Now, can someone please tell me, what's the problem? Why are us men, us fathers, treated like second-class citizens? One of the things I teach about leaders is that a good leader is someone who brings out the best in others. I'm trying to do that.

Is mainstream media part of the problem in this area?

Mainstream media, it's all a narrative; they don't want to tell the stories of men's pain. My aim is to shine a light on these issues. It's considered too hard, well, look forward to where we'll be in 20-30 years' time. When my son says to me, 'The world's a mess', I reply, 'No, son, the world's not a mess. It's the people who are messed up. It's the choices. It's the decisions. We have no leaders. If these leaders really want to keep our community safe as we keep hearing, we must start having these conversations. We are missing the big picture. I'm not going to go quietly.' ●