

TASMANIAN

BE TASMANIAN PODCAST

Episode Three: The problem only we can solve

(Be Tasmanian Podcast—theme music)

Welcome to Be Tasmanian, a podcast about an impossible mission in a small state at the bottom of the world. It's about uncovering a hidden story that unites people and using that story to inspire community action.

It's about place-branding, destination-marketing, and economic development but it's really about culture. It's about who we are, why we live where we live, what all that means and what we ought to do about it.

This is episode 3.

(Be Tasmanian Podcast—theme music)

The oldest written 'Cinderella story' is Greek, and about 2,000 years old, with even older roots as an oral tale.

In this version, her name isn't Cinderella. It's Rhodopis: a hard-working, mistreated, but beautiful slave.

One hot day Rhodopis was bathing at Naucratis, a Greek colony on the banks of the Nile, when an eagle swooped down and stole one of her sandals. The eagle flew south all the way to Memphis, where the king was holding the Ancient Egyptian version of court.

Just as the king was doling out some justice, the eagle dropped the sandal into his lap. It was a charming sandal, a lovely sandal. And there was something about the contour of the foot. The King of Egypt felt something about this sandal and the woman who wore it and he decided—and who can blame him?—that this sandal had fallen from Heaven, and meant something.

The king sent his finest soldiers to search all of Egypt until they found her. When they did, the mistreated, underappreciated, hard-working, uncomplaining, big-hearted Rhodopis became his queen.

The classic rags-to-riches tale is about someone, an inherently good and deserving person, being lifted out of poverty and into a life of power, prestige, and riches. Rhodopis is Cinderella, is Annie. There are versions from China and Vietnam, Cuba, Indonesia. There are Persian, Algonquin and Ojibway versions.

It's an iconic plot, specific to its time and place, yet universal. Deeply human.

Cultures that formed in isolation from one another tell the same kinds of stories, in different ways. The rags-to-riches plot, or pattern, is one of them. I'm sure you can imagine multiple versions of the Cinderella story from your favourite novels and movies: Great Expectations, Aladdin, Willy Wonka and the Chocolate Factory, Rocky, Slumdog Millionaire.

As for its role in place-branding, we immediately associate the rags-to-riches story with America. And when they talk about the American dream, this is what they mean. Growing up in a slum, or in the country, or in a one stop-light town in Kentucky and ending up in a New York City penthouse, this is the quintessentially American story.

In 2004, at the Democratic National Convention, a junior senator from Illinois made one of the keynote speeches. There are a lot of speakers at these conventions, and most of them tend to be forgettable. This unknown young man, Barack Obama, wasn't remotely forgettable.

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From the beginning to 00:57 “to so many who had come before

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueMNqdB1QIE>

“Let me express my deepest gratitude for the privilege of addressing this convention. Tonight is a particular honour for me because, let’s face it, my presence on this stage is pretty unlikely. My father was a foreign student, born and raised in a small village in Kenya. He grew up herding goats, went to school in a tin roof shack. His father, my grandfather, was a cook—a domestic servant to the British. But my grandfather had larger dreams for his son. Through hard work and perseverance my father got a scholarship to study in a magical place: America. That’s shown as a beacon of freedom and opportunity for so many that had come before.”

Barack Obama was not yet... Barack Obama. So he started speaking before the audience had a chance to finish shouting and applauding. But he knew what he was doing to his audience. He did it several times in this speech that made his reputation.

In other speeches, later on, he and Michelle Obama would talk about his garage sale furniture and going out for dates in a car so rusted you could see the road when you looked down while driving. Yet here he was, on his way to the presidency.

Continue: 2:43 “I stand here knowing” to 2:59 “story even possible.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ueMNqdB1QIE>

“I stand here knowing that my story is part of the larger American story, that I owe a debt to all of those who came before me. And that in no other country on earth is my story even be possible.”

The reason these were his applause lines were because, to the audience, they felt profoundly true. They felt truer than anything. This is our story. This is who we are, at our best. The brand of a place, of a people, is a unifying cultural expression. When we express it, we use emotion. Then we back it up, with strategy, to ensure it’s true... to ensure we aren’t contradicting ourselves and damaging our brand with the decisions we make. And over time, everything we do reinforces that central story.

This is what it means to be American. You can begin your career with the crappiest car in Chicago and end up rich and powerful... end up in the White House.

Alright. What does it mean to be Tasmanian?

As we learned in episode two, Tasmanians always found a way to talk about how it’s harder here. We struggle. We hit all kinds of obstacles- from people telling us our culture doesn’t exist, to people telling us our dream isn’t worth pursuing. They mocked and underestimated us. They told us we weren’t good enough.

And for too long, as Tasmanians, we believed it.

But then, something happened. Again and again.

In episode two we heard from Dr Emma Lee, talking about the Tasmanian Aboriginal community—whose struggles helped create the definition of the word genocide, helped create the UN Convention against it.

Here she is with the next part of her story.

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2:18 “So our story” to 3:09 “has been little heard.”

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BcYqeuE0nl4>

“So our story has been a struggle, being able to prove our humanity. And yet in 2016, something miraculous happened, something so wonderful that we were acknowledged in the Tasmanian state constitution (each state in Australia has its own constitution). We were acknowledged as First Nations and Traditional Owners, in December 2016. Most people don’t know about this, this extraordinary story of our people never having to prove our identity and our humanity again has been little heard.”

Dr Lee talks about how she did it: how as a PhD student she and an elder and a contract public servant went through the white pages and found out how to contact the Minister for the Environment.

4:48 “And we rang up...” to 5:46 “shocked that it worked.”

“And we rang up and said: Good news! We love you! Thank you for your genocide, thank you for your exile, thank you for your dispossession, we love you. And rather than being shown the door as some kind of lunatic, the government said, “tell us more, what do you mean? What do you want?” We just wanted a place, a culturally safe space where we could see each other as brothers and sisters, where white fellas could belong to us, and we’d belong to them, under kinship to demonstrate our humanity. And we love bombed them. We love bombed the government and it worked. Still to this day I’m shocked it worked.”

As you can hear, Dr Lee is a charismatic and powerful woman. She speaks in moving detail about how her strategy of ‘love-bombing’ worked, about how her community went from genocide and the pain of non-existence into something new, a relationship based on kinship and reciprocity... on a shared understanding of country. This is the most moving of all Tasmanian transformations. And Aboriginal communities are still in the midst of it.

While most of the Tasmanian stories we heard were about individuals, or small groups of individuals, there were a few other examples of community transformations.

In the late 19th Century, Derby was a spectacularly prosperous tin mining town in the north east of Tasmania. People came from around the world to seek their fortune. It reached a peak and then, as mining towns tend to do, it began to change. People didn’t need tin like they used to. There was a devastating flood in 1929, and neither the mine nor the town recovered. There was a long, slow, sad decline.

Then, some people with mountain bikes discovered the local mountain was a damn good place to ride. Derby is in a temperate rainforest, and there’s something about the dirt. The mountain bikers worked with local council members, and a lot of people said no, but they kept pushing, and investors came—public and private, and volunteers.

They understood no one would come all the way to Tasmania for mountain biking if the trails were just... okay. The mountain bike trails had to be different, special, harder. So they worked harder, more imaginatively.

Today, Derby isn’t a sad old mining town without a mine. It’s been voted, by the global mountain bike racing community, as one of the best places to ride on the planet. Here’s Buck Gibson, owner of Vertigo Mountain Bike Tours:

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2:11 *“Derby was a quiet little” to “benefit from mountain biking.”*

https://www.youtube.com/watch?time_continue=133&v=66i8-A67lLo&feature=emb_logo

“Derby was a quiet, little backwater town, not much happening at all, so there was initial scepticism of it, “oh, you know you’re not going spend millions of dollars and bring people in” they were really sceptical and now all of a sudden what mountain biking has done is bring lots of energy into the town, the locals here are really supportive of it, a lot of them are involved in businesses now that benefit from mountain biking.”

How about a man named Dale, who grew up on a farm near Burnie. He wanted to become a mechanic. But he was, from the beginning, a creative mechanic. Still in his teens, he began tinkering with mining equipment, and trucks, that worked for the surface, but not underground. This wasn’t regular teenage stuff, what he began doing in his dad’s shed. It was Dale Elphinstone’s passion, to make mining equipment smarter and safer.

He developed a relationship with Caterpillar, who recognised immediately that Dale Elphinstone was doing something special, and soon he was exporting his vehicles all over the world.

Today, like a lot of Tasmanians, I was on the Tasman Bridge. In the summer of 1975, a ship carrying iron ore smashed into one of the bridge’s pylons. This bridge links Hobart with its eastern suburbs and the airport. It’s important. This was a monstrous disaster. Twelve people died when a section of the bridge collapsed. Tasmanians told us this story, and the story of a man named Bob who was running a little company at the time—mostly catered pleasure-cruises. He turned his attention immediately to ferrying people across the Derwent River. Also immediately, he began thinking about how ferries could be... better.

Like Dale Elphinstone in the north west, Bob Clifford in the south developed a passion for making something better. Bob and his friends had grown up sailing in the Southern Ocean, the most turbulent waters in the world, so if you build anything here—you’re already thinking it has to be strong. It has to be light. It has to be fast.

Bob invented the wave-piercing catamaran and the company he founded, International Catamaran, or INCAT, makes beautiful, safe, light, environmentally friendly fast-ferries. When the operators of the world’s ferries began calling, Bob asked his sailing mates to help supply what he needed. Everything had to be stronger, lighter, safer, and more comfortable than anything else on the market. Why? Because it’s made in Tasmania. It has to be.

In our interviews with Tasmanians, they talked about travelling to Japan or the UK or Canada or South America and seeing an INCAT ship. It made them think of home: what it means to create at home. There is something about the quality of invention, and cooperation, that you just don’t find in other places. It’s true in the maritime sector, in cheese and wine, in museums, in comedy, and—at our best—in tourism.

Brett Torossi, a tourism pioneer in Tasmania, arrived here from the big cities of mainland Australia, first on vacations with her sister, and saw and smelled and felt the specialness in the local way of life: fresh air, spectacular scenery, and a culture of craft and creativity that was rare in the exponential growth economies of, well, almost everywhere.

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Dorchester on the Beach

0:19 to “On one of these adventures...” to 0:44 “it felt amazing.”

“On one of these adventures I went to the east coast, and I thought oh my goodness me, this is my country. I immediately fell in love with it: the aqua ocean, the Freycinet Peninsula, the orange lichens, and the white sands. It wasn’t like anywhere else I had been, and it felt amazing.”

Brett feels strongly. But she’s also a numbers person. She understood what was happening broadly in this place: the price-taking commodity industries that had previously dominated the Tasmanian economy were in a slow decline. Not because we were running out of stuff. We had plenty of that. When globalisation forces you to compete on price, shipping and labour and other input costs put Tasmania at a price disadvantage.

She focused on what set Tasmania apart. It had to be about the quiet, the wildness, the beauty, the craft, the delicious food and drinks, all of it set against the loud, busy, and beige of the globalised metropolis.

For Brett, the solution was obvious. But it wasn’t obvious to everyone. It wasn’t easy, but eventually she acquired 1,200 or 1,300 acres just to secure the three acres overlooking the sea she wanted.

2:29 “Anyway we got the design done...” to “for years and years and years.”

*“Anyway we got the design done, and this crazy skeleton of steel went up, and the real estate agent in town was stirring everyone, at first telling them that it was going to be a service station, and then telling them that it was a greyhound breeding facility. I think he had quite a good time with it. Anyway I did the numbers, I’d done the numbers for **the business before obviously** before I started, and I believed that I could get a tariff, an overnight tariff of \$500 a night for that premium experience. And at the time the highest tariff overnight was in Hobart actually at Hunter Street and it was \$247, and it was three bedrooms overlooking the harbour in town.*

So I went and talked to various people who were local, who all said there is no way you will get \$500 a night, you’re mad, you’re completely crazy. Anyway, I believed my research, and I believed my numbers and pursued and started, and we opened, and we got \$500 a night. Every night. And we were booked out, for years and years and years.”

Brett didn’t give up, even when everyone told her it wouldn’t work. Like a lot of people who arrive here from afar and seem to fit in immediately, she embraced Tasmanian culture.

Differentness, smallness, closeness and connectedness, wildness, quietness, hauntedness, the cool and the atmospheric.

There was a time, when like almost every city and state, we tended to ignore what it meant to be Tasmanian. Instead, we hired people to boast about us. We’re the best! The absolute greatest! World class! Just like all you sophisticated folks in the big city.

It never worked.

In our interviews, Tasmanians told us how, until recently, they shrank from the truth: from the smallness and the differentness, that it’s more forest than shopping mall here. It wasn’t cool to be cool, and quiet, and haunted. Even the unusually strong connections between people had been, a generation ago, something we didn’t talk about. And it wasn’t a great pitch to suggest we have to work harder here. Not everyone wants to work hard.

But not everyone can be Tasmanian. Not everyone wants to be Tasmanian. And we have to be okay with that. Our audience isn’t... everyone.

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Nick Haddow's recording

9:06 "You have to earn your..." to 9:47 "Tasmanian in the way that you do it."

Here's Nick Haddow again.

"You have to earn your respect in Tasmania, more than maybe any other place that I've been, and you have to earn it a very Tasmanian way, the kind of credibility that you have to develop in Tasmania, it's not superficial credibility, you have to not just be good at what you do, but you have to be an integral part of the community, you have to be to be giving back, you have to be tapped in on so many different levels, you know. Just being an expert or good at something, that's not nearly good enough in Tasmania, you have to actually be Tasmanian in the way that you do it."

The Tasmanian Symphony Orchestra is far, far away from the global centres of classical music, playing in a small market. Yet, it has become one of the go-to recording orchestras in the southern hemisphere. People have been growing and fermenting grapes in Tasmania for a long time, but for most of that time it was never considered a proper wine region. Why would it? The reliable heat of the Australian mainland is a global wine powerhouse, producing lakes and lakes of the big, sunny, boozy tastes of shiraz and cabernet sauvignon. The grapes have to work harder in Tasmania, and we have to work harder to extract wine from them.

Here's Sheralee Davies, who moved here from South Australia when she discovered something different about this place, and became CEO of Wine Tasmania:

"There's definitely a little bit of craziness involved in growing grapes and making wine, so we talk about it quite a lot. You wouldn't come to Tasmania to grow grapes and to make wine because it was the cheapest place to do so, or because it was the easiest, or because it was the most consistent, or the most reliable. We are the opposite of all of those things.

It is more expensive here, we have greater variability every single year than anywhere else in the country. We have those greater risks—we have no two vintages ever the same, so you have to be a special kind of person to be motivated by something other than perhaps wealth, and ease, you know, it's neither of those things, it's actually this pursuit of the best quality we can possibly get and you'll see so many people that have actually moved from wine regions elsewhere around the country that have got access to growing grapes anywhere else in the country and have chosen Tasmania, not because it's the cheapest, not because it's the easiest, but because they know that they're able to craft some of the best wines here with the focus on those varieties that we do so well.

The big focus for everyone, regardless of what else they are growing is pinot noir and I guess we certainly nod our heads to those in Burgundy who have been doing it for centuries, in a slightly different way, but people just lose their minds a little bit about pinot noir, whether they're growing it, making it, or whether they're consuming it. It is harder than most other grapes to grow. It's notoriously thin-skinned and finicky and fussy, and so it is known universally as the heartbreak grape."

There's something about heartbreak, longing, great risk and strange rewards. It's the same story with Tasmanian avocados and Tasmanian cherries, the beef of King Island, where happy cows roam the wild grasses, and the same with lobsters and abalone. For a hundred years Tasmanians have built and invented their way to 100% renewable electricity, despite enormous obstacles and sacrifices. The battle between hydro-electric dam construction and those who wanted to preserve and protect the wilderness resulted in the birth of a global environmental political movement. In our interviews with Tasmanians, even those who said they'd never vote for the Green party, were deeply proud that it was invented here. And now a company called Hydrowood pulls exotic Tasmanian minor species timber, like Huon Pine, from flooded areas and, working with design makers and architects, transforms them into boutique products.

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Brett Torossi talked about building something so special it would get \$500 a night. But, for Brett, and every other entrepreneur we met, it's about something more enriching than money.

The difference between the American version of the Cinderella story and the Tasmanian version is that, in Tasmania, it's almost never about money and power. It's about meaning and togetherness. At a time when so much of contemporary life feels exhausting and empty, you can come here and participate in something else entirely. Sure, you can make money. We want you to make money.

But in Tasmania, we want you to fall asleep at night feeling like you did something meaningful today. Is that a plot type? Rags to meaning?

The story we heard, again and again, is that being Tasmanian is 'the quiet pursuit of the extraordinary'.

Why quiet? I'm from a loud place. I can be a bit shouty myself. The world is increasingly loud, and if you aren't loud, you can feel forgotten. Yet Tasmanians are relentlessly, charmingly humble. Their new confidence is gentle. Shoutiness and boastfulness just doesn't work here.

Why the quiet pursuit? Those ancient and modern obstacles and struggles, errors, horrors, and the economic, social and cultural realities that come with isolation, the feeling of being misunderstood and underestimated, all this inspires hard work, imagination, and determination.

And why the extraordinary? It's the outcome. When you work hard, think differently, and feel like you can't quit... when you're told, again and again, that it isn't good enough... that you aren't good enough, good enough is never good enough. Then there's the courageous decision to preserve and protect the wilderness, when the rest of the world is going in the opposite direction. Is it extraordinary? It isn't a perfect word, but what's happening here is certainly not ordinary.

It's Tasmanian.

So... back to the job. Back to what place-branding is all about.

How do we inject the word Tasmanian with all that meaning?

How do we tell this story back to Tasmanians—straight to their hearts?

How do we do it without overwhelming people with logos and taglines and brand books and podcasts and statistics and special-pleading? How do we, together, make all of this more than communication, make it action, a powerful strategy owned and shared by 520,000 people, at a time when everyone is cynical about the word brand? How do we do all of this in a Tasmanian way? How do we do it without an advertising budget?

That is what we'll explore in episode 4 of Be Tasmanian.

(Be Tasmanian Podcast—theme music)

Hey, if you have questions about what you heard today about me, or the team, or Brand Tasmania, send us an email at podcast@brandtasmania.com.au.