

Transcript of interview with Matthew Harris

Jeremy Melder 00:00

Hello, my name is Jeremy Melder. And I'm the presenter from Beaming Green. Before we start, I would like to acknowledge that this podcast is being held on the traditional lands of the Bundjalung people, and paying our respects to elders both past, present, and emerging. The beaming green podcast is a podcast that will help you take out some of the stress and confusion about how to live your life more sustainably. We do this by introducing you to inspiring people with first-hand experience and expertise who covered aspects of sustainability, from human interest to environmental perspectives, helping you to thrive and enhance your life, and the lives of your friends and family. I'm welcoming Matthew Harris, who's written a wonderful book, which is called the way of the courageous vulnerable. Matthew and I have known each other for several years, and known each other from days of Melbourne, living in Melbourne together, and well not living together. But, you know, knowing each other in Melbourne. And Matthew comes from a background of teaching, and he teaches Japanese. But he's written his wonderful book. And I'd love Matthew, to share with you what brought him down that path. So welcome, Matthew to Beaming Green. Thank you very much. So, Matthew, could you tell our listeners about this book? And what led you down this path to write because writing a book is no mean feat? Is it?

Matthew Harris 01:44

Exactly. And it was one of those things that it was maybe five or six years ago that I had an intuitive sense that you're going to write a book. And that's basically all I had, write a book. I don't know what page one is; I don't know what it's about, I don't know where to start. So, what I did was just get started. And the way I got started was just by using stimulus from Facebook, where I'd see someone's writing, and then I would write a response. And then often I would take that response and then put it on to my posts. So that way, I was getting practice at writing, and writing from my own personal experience and wanting to put in some sort of depth, some sort of message in there. Because I wasn't really interested in telling people about what I had for lunch or what I had for dinner or, or something like that I wanted to do something to be reflective of more of the depth of who I am and put that out into the world. So then about so I just kept on doing that, knowing that in the in the back of my mind, this intuitive voice, it said, you're going to write a book. And again, I didn't know what it was about didn't know how to start. So, then I think it was in about middle of 2017. Again, the intuitive voice said, That's enough. I then collected all the material that I'd written, which was now perhaps several 100 little articles and posts that I'd written on Facebook, and I get them together. And this then was like, right, okay, now, this is what the book is about. And again, this all these diverse topics that I that are chosen, I had no idea what it was about. And then as I talked to a friend, I had all this material and I talked to a guy when I was living up in Maleny, up in Queensland, who I engaged as an editor, and I said, I've got all this material. What do I do with it? No, it's good stuff. And he just said, as we were talking out came the idea of the hero's journey, the hero's journey was just a constant theme in what I was talking about. And the hero's journey, as probably most of you know, is a timeless template, which was researched by a guy called Joseph Campbell in in the United States. And he famously researched stories from around the world across time. And he found that there were similarities and all these different stories. He called it the mono myth. And he was in his book in 1945 book called the hero with 1000 faces. And so, I was just referring to the hero's journey, the hero's journey, the hero's journey, all the time. And then Travis my editor just said, why don't we use that as the structure, the hero's journey as the structure. And we

put all these different articles into the different stages of the journey. So ah, yeah. So, then that became the structure of the book. And I then started slotting all these different articles and poems and stories and things like that into it. And what I realized was that, from that place of not knowing I was led on this creative journey, if you like to fill in all these different things into the book, and to fill in all the different stages of the journey. So, my book is, has seven stages to the journey. Now that in a writer's hero's journey, there could be as many as 18, all different stages, and all these different happenings and things like that, but it's much to just simplify, it is just much easier for people to grasp. So, there's just basic elements like you start off in a known world. So, you know, everybody starts off in a family, or you start off in your hometown, like we started off in Melbourne. Or it could be a relationship. Or if you progress further, it could be a state of mind, your beliefs, and things like that. That's like your, the known world, how you believe in perceiving the world. And then you, there's some sort of call to adventure, do this. So, in my case, it was like, write a book. I don't know what that's about. But then there comes the point where you cross the threshold, and you say, yes, I'm going to do that.

Jeremy Melder 06:51

Thanks for sharing that so far. But what I found really fascinating when you were sharing was that this started off from a place of vulnerability, you were sharing your vulnerability, which is on a stage, which is called Facebook. But you know, not many people really share their true essence of their vulnerability in in general, I mean, there's some people that do. So, it started from that, that raw place within yourself. And then that expression came from there in it, and it grew from there. So yeah, it's kind of interesting, isn't it?

Matthew Harris 07:24

Yeah, very much. So. And hence the why it's called the way of the courageous vulnerable, that I wanted to share something that was true about me. And true about my perception of the world and my reflection of the world. And people responded well to that. It wasn't just some meme that that I got from Google and just put that up. But it was genuinely about me about what was happening for me, whether it was physical ill health, or a sense of poverty, or, you know, relationship breakdown or something like that. But I was I was, I was sharing it from that place of, in a way, detachment. So, I was aware of what it was that I was going through, and what I've been through. And I just wanted to put this into some sort of context that that was, was sharing something that was true for me, and putting that on to this public forum called Facebook. And I found that that satisfied something within me. And most of this stuff that I was writing was only like 100, or 200, or maybe even 300 words or something like that. And, but I was, I was just genuinely trying to get to what is the simple heart of what it is that the point that I'm trying to make? And often I would start with, with like, a heading. And it could be something like the courageous vulnerable, and then I would just start writing from there. And normally, it would take me somewhere between 20 to 40 minutes, and then I would just post it and, and then, and went from there and went from there.

Jeremy Melder 09:13

And did you feel like you were getting favorable responses and connection with people through that process?

Matthew Harris 09:19

Yeah, I was. Yeah, I was. And, and, and it's one of those things that people would reflect upon that and often was, women would reflect upon and, and so yeah, that happened to me too. And, but it's not just that happened to me, but it gives them a different perspective of what this event meant. So, what I did was, so it doesn't have to be about you know, this terrible event happened, you know, I got sick or something like that, but, and asking or seeking for sympathy, but rather, I can see how this feeds into part of my growth. So, if I got injured or something like that, that I can see how it's there, it's the injury or the hardship is there for me to grow through or grow out of and gain some sort of wisdom. And what I was doing was trying to put that wisdom out into the world.

Jeremy Melder 10:22

So, there's been a resurgence in terms of, you know, people writing books about rites of passage, I feel. And, you know, there's a big, there's a big movement, you know, going on with that, you know, I've interviewed a couple of people already on this show, about this. And I'm, you know, as, as you know, I'm quite fascinated by rites of passage. Why do you think that is? Why do you think there is that resurgence in terms of Rites of Passage? And what makes your book different? Or what would it stand out about it?

Matthew Harris 10:57

I think that there's a movement to maturity going on. I think that the worldwide there is a big Hero's Journey going on around the world right now and has been going on for several years. And so, the rite of passage is getting back to those old ways of connecting with community and getting people, particularly younger people through the stages of the rites of passage and out into their maturity, which is what we're supposed to be as human beings, we're supposed to be mature. And that's one of the great gifts of you know, of the hero's journey, or rites of passage is that it takes us through this. But the great things about things like the rites of passage is that there's now supportive men and women, older men and women who've been through that process themselves, who can help and assist younger people through those processes. And it's all about maturity. And so those people who've gone through it, continue to grow themselves, and open themselves to that. So that the way that my book is, is structured, it's not, it gains a whole lot of things from my personal experience, but also a whole range of different sort of wisdom, experiences as well, so that there's also some funny bits in it, as well. So, because there's absurd and funny things happen in our lives, yes. So, I've put in several different things in there. And one of the things that I've got in there is about relationships are one of the great teachers of our lives

Jeremy Melder 12:45

without a doubt.

Matthew Harris 12:48

But they are hard. It's, it's a difficult, you know, we think it's all about being in love and, and, and just indulging ourselves in this in this lovely feeling of love. But it's when we get into the relationship, it is a rite of passage in unto itself. So, there's intense pressure. It's a vessel that where maybe two people are contained. And there's pressure, there's heat, there's darkness, there's a whole range of things that come in, which then changes somebody, and they go through the relationship then is the vehicle for them to go through their own hero's journey, their own rites of passage to uncover false beliefs or their

own personal darkness or trauma, or whatever it is, and move through that into some new way of being an enlightenment or awakening, which then creates a whole new relationship. Yeah, which you never thought of when you first started. Yeah. So, my book contains a whole range of different things, you know, short little pieces, pieces of wisdom that come along. So, it's not just a hero's journey, story or, but taking you through how we live our ordinary lives. It's the way that we live the hero's journey and find meaning and purpose in our lives. It's not by doing dramatic things. It's by just living your ordinary life and relating to people in your community.

Jeremy Melder 14:26

I think it's an interesting thing that you raise Just then, particularly about this, you know, thinking that it's got to be something of magnificence or awarded or you know, you've won a Nobel Peace Prize, but really living an ordinary life is a wonderful thing. It isn't it we don't see we don't hear much about the ordinary person's life. We hear about the great things that people have done. So, people aspire to be great. But really being ordinary, is not ordinary. It's extraordinary. Isn't

Matthew Harris 14:59

it? It is it is an and we are We live in a world surrounded by ordinary heroes. But we just don't see it, we don't acknowledge it. And we don't appreciate it. So, my book really does highlight those sorts of things that we are surrounded by ordinary heroes that by living your ordinary life, you are pursuing your purpose in life. And it's really you are appreciating that, that is, then is how you find the meaning through your by finding your purpose. So, just as an example, you know, that the thing that the hero's journey, you must be heroic to leave the hero the hero's journey? Well, that's just not true. I mean, my mum was a hero. Yeah, my mum managed a hot bread shop in Melbourne, for 15 or 16 years or something like that. And if you pardon the pun, she was literally the sole breadwinner. in the, in the family for many years, my dad was out of work for a long period of time. And there were five children. And she was she was the one who, you know, bake the bread, bake the bread, she would literally bring home rolls for us to eat and things like that. And it was a tough time, but that there was a huge amount of courage and nobility in what she was doing. But if you said to it, you know, you're a hero. No way. Yeah, no way. But what she was doing was living a very ordinary life. And she also held a lot of fear and anxiety in her body, she had illnesses and things like that, what she went through as well. But what she did was very much a heroic journey, which she did mostly by herself. So, you know, that is how, you know people live very noble and courageous lives.

Jeremy Melder 17:07

I agree with that. I mean, I have observed that with many people, even if my family, my parents, as well coming as immigrants to Australia, yeah, having to do two jobs and things like that just to get started in life. And that's a hero's journey on its own there, isn't it?

Matthew Harris 17:22

It is? Absolutely, you know, my parents did the same thing that we came from England, in the mid 60s. And of course, you know, just like your parents probably didn't know anybody. In a completely different culture, different weather systems, you know, the money is different, all basic things are different. And it's really, really in the last 10 or 20 years that's a really big thing to do is to cross that threshold, and journey into an unknown land where you are confronted with a whole range of trials and challenges and

things like that, and find the way to not just survive, but eventually thrive and, and bring your gifts and talents out into the world. So yeah, it's a whole hero's journey, and just doing those ordinary things.

Jeremy Melder 18:13

Yeah, I agree with that. Now, it's also interested to hear that you were talking about the role of elders, and this is my little pet love is that we don't really acknowledge the elders enough in our in our society, particularly where we live in Australia. And I'm just wondering, what are your thoughts on that? How can we get more engagement between the young and the old? Because there's so much wisdom there that can be shared? Yeah. And how can we honor the elders?

Matthew Harris 18:44

That's, you mentioned it before, by going through things like the rites of passage, there's more and more of those sorts of programs being introduced. Through our community. One of the things that happens, having worked as a teacher in throughout Melbourne, Victoria, New South Wales, and now in Queensland as well. One of the things that's being introduced is a very common thing is Welcome to Country, acknowledgement of country at assemblies. There are things like the apology by Kevin Rudd is often in school. So, it's known it's like the odd school that doesn't have that sort of thing. It's very common now to acknowledge the land to acknowledge the past, present and future leaders, and elders of indigenous culture. So just doing that is a huge difference from you know, when we grew up, we were kids Yeah, there's nothing like that. There was no God Save the Queen and

Jeremy Melder 19:54

stand in line and be obedient. That's it. Yeah,

Matthew Harris 19:57

that's right. So, things have changed immensely. Since we were little kids, even things like that the homophobia that we grew up with in our teenage years, to now, you know, meeting men together, and the way that we make we greet each other is with a hug. And yeah, so huge steps have been made in our culture, quite unconsciously, towards the, the breaking down of old barriers and stereotypes and things like that, with the rise of Rites of Passage programs and things like that, that's bringing things in, oh, also things like men's groups, which now there are more and more men's groups around, which is great looking after Men's Health is just terrific. All those sorts of things are happening. And the protocols that are that are stated right at the start of every man's group is that we do these things, it's all about confidentiality is all about safety. It's all about these sorts of things. And that way, a man can feel safe to speak, what is going on with him right now. And the idea that it's no man's job to rescue someone, another man is just there to listen to pay attention to respect and recognize, those are basic things of helping people bring out wisdom. And it also one of the essential elements is listening. Listening is a huge element of allowing someone to just be who they are in that moment, when they're upset about something or other or something like that. And just the fact that you're in their presence, and you're listening for it with a particular intention. That's the demonstration of wisdom. And love. How you demonstrate love is often just through listening. So, to come back to your question of, of elders, the wise old man or the archetype of the wise old man, the wise old woman, one of the things that they do is listen, and just pay attention. They know that dramatic things happen. They dramatic things happen like in Melbourne right now and Victoria, huge storms and floods and things like that happening. But it's

the allowance of these natural things to happen to watch and listen to pay attention. And I know it's an overused phrase, but to hold space for those things to happen to allow the new thing to arise. So

Jeremy Melder 22:43

yeah, no, thanks for that. Thanks for answering that. So poignantly, we talk a lot about rites of passage, and it seems to be predominantly talked about, from a masculine perspective, the hero's journey, but I think you know, you were you're in agreeance with me that there is also a part to play in the hero's journey. For the feminine. Hmm. Would you like to elaborate a bit about that?

Matthew Harris 23:08

Sure. The hero's journey, there's no gender bias. Yeah, regarding that,

Jeremy Melder 23:16

but it just seems to be people think it's a masculine thing. For some reason, I don't know why. But anyway, yes. So

Matthew Harris 23:21

so, because it says hero, I think people mistake the hero's journey for the archetype of the hero, you know, it should be Thor, or the whole Thor, or something like that. And, but like I said, before, you know, my mum would be, I would consider her a hero. Yeah. In, in her journey. But women go through the hero's journey as well, you know, just the basic steps of getting a call to adventure, which is like this sense of, of, you're pursuing your own sense of purpose, you then cross the threshold. So, it could be going into a relationship or, or getting a sense that I must move state. So, both of us have moved from Melbourne, up here into Northern New South Wales. And many other people get that sort of call to adventure as well. And then there are the trials and challenges that we go through whether it's in a new job, or in a relationship, that there are doubts and fears. And part of the process is that is to uncover beliefs, false beliefs that we may have that underlie our sense of self. Yeah. And often these beliefs that things like whether it's, I need to be perfect. I'm not good enough. I'm not worthy. And so, the hero's journey takes us through that. But there's also now the hero's journey was coined regarding Joseph Campbell's monomyth idea. But then there was a woman called Maureen Murdock who wrote a book called the heroines journey, right. And that's more about the internal journey that we go on as we go on that external journey, which is the hero's journey. So, the internal journeys, the heroine's journey, and one of the things that the basic stages of it is that we go through a, departing. So, we're starting in the known world, which is considered that the feminine thought the world of the feminine. So, we're in our home environment, the hearth and so we have comfort around those sorts of things. But as we go on our hero's journey we separate from or reject the feminine, which is the world of the natural processes and natural way of doing things. And we launch out into an idea of where it is that we should be a goal setting type of thing. So, it's outward and upward, which is the way of the masculine. So, I'm going on to it to achieve some goal, whether it's achieved my university degree, or I'm going to be the best yoga teacher in the in the world, and I'm going to save the world. And I'm going to heal everybody and all those sorts of things. So that's like, leaving or separating the world of the feminine, and launching into and identifying with the way of the masculine, I've got to go out there I've got to achieve, I've got to compete, I've got to compare myself to other people, which is the way of the masculine now, at some point, that's got to fail, it has to fail, it can, you can only go upward and outward, for so long, until you

just can't sustain it anymore. So that's where something will happen. You could get ill there could be a betrayal, there could be some event that will snap for you, that will mean that you must fall. And the metaphor that I like, the analogy is the story of Icarus, who flies up into the sky aiming for the sun, and he flies too high. And then he falls, which is in the fall is into the feminine, so the way of the masculine is upward and outward. And the way of the feminine is inward and downward. So that's why when we fail, we often move into depression or sadness or melancholy. We're being made to come inward and downward. So

Jeremy Melder 27:45

So, would you just to clarify that in terms of that downwards and inward it's kind of a nurturing and healing process that you're going through? Isn't it's not like you're looking down on yourself? It's really looking inwards and reflection type of time.

Matthew Harris 28:02

Yeah, well, and in but it's also going down into, in, in Hero's Journey terms, I call it the abyss, you're going into the darkness. But you're going into the darkness, to uncover the falsities to recover the trueness that is within you. So that's where you go out of the masculine, you face yourself, which is the way of the divine feminine. And it can be hard. And it's also symbolized like the darkness of the moon. Yeah, when the moon goes dark, that's when we go inward. And as the moon arises again, and we get the new light coming out, that's when we filled with a sense of regeneration and renewal, and the whole cycle starts over again, we get filled with a sense of hope and, and rebirth. So yeah, the way of the feminine is all part of this cycle. It's integral and essential.

Jeremy Melder 29:07

Yeah. And I think as human beings, we have both elements on masculine and, and feminine. And yes, you know, there are times that we're both playing that part or that role or engaging that role, aren't we?

Matthew Harris 29:20

Yeah, absolutely. And I've been reflecting about that, that the way of the feminine is, is hard both for women and for men. But like one of the articles, I write is about the heroine's journey. And for many women, they've gone through the journey into the masculine where they must compete with men and many women have commented that they carry a lot of armor. They're very, very armored. And so, the breaking down of that armor is falling into vulnerability, you need a huge amount of support and courage to be able to allow that armor to drop. And when that happens, that's when women step into their great wisdom and, and the archetype of the Crone, which is the wise old woman, and the amount of great strength, that women who have been through that journey and can stand as that they support not only women, but they're able to support men who go through that journey as well is just phenomenal. I've been fortunate enough to meet, you know, many, not many, but several women who've been able to hold me space while I've gone through really hard times. Many times

Jeremy Melder 30:50

been very blessed that way. Yeah, yeah. Yeah. So, there's no discounting the role of the feminine, or the masculine for that matter? Yes. They both, you know, have value add value in all their lives. And, you know, now, I would love you to tell us about the book's availability, where it's available, how can

people get a hold of it? And what your plans are once you've just launched this book, haven't you? Yes, yes. What are your What are your hopes?

Matthew Harris 31:23

Well, first, I was just so relieved, so stoked when I finally got to the end of the, the writing the editing the production stage, it's like finally out there. I was just so stoked. And I remember showing it to you, you know, was it three weeks ago? Yeah. Only a very short time ago. But it's like, finally, yeah. So that's, that's like one stage of ending a new beginning. For me, it's just been, you know, wonderful. I've had great support from people. But I've got a website called www.courageousjourney.com.au where you can order the book and a print version of the book. You can also get it through Amazon as an E book and a print version, and you just need to look up the way of the courageous vulnerable. And you can get it from there. Yeah, well, I'll

Jeremy Melder 32:23

be putting all those links up on the on the show notes as well. But what are your plans moving forward? Like he is going to be starting to do some a book talk? And it's hard with COVID? I imagine but you know, yeah, what, what are the plans there?

Matthew Harris 32:37

Well, the, the plans to engage with different groups, and partner with different groups, like different men's groups and things like that, and give workshops about the hero's journey, seminars about it, and eventually do retreats, and, you know, person to person retreats for people to help them engage with the hero's journey themselves. We're really blessed to live, you know, where we live in, we are looking out the window. Beautiful environment feels like one of the things that that I certainly got, from my journey is the importance of the land and nature as part of a regenerative cycle within ourselves. And the land up here is very, very special. It's one of the places where I learnt when I first came up here, over 10 years ago, 11 years ago, I stayed in in Ocean Shores and I could really feel that there's something special going on with this land. So that I was getting a healing benefit just by staying at my friend's place in Ocean Shores. Yeah. So ideally, what I'd like would be to have a person to person retreats somewhere around you know, perhaps in Ukiah, something like that. And get people to not just think about the hero's journey in their lives, but then go outside and sit on the land walk in the land, that the land then becomes part of their regeneration process to enable them to go through their own hero's journey as they're on the retreat as well. So that's like personal person things, but it also will be developing online programs as well, to enable you to go through the hero's journey online, first, first, it'll be like introductory programs, but then it'll go through more in-depth programs as I facilitate people through the process of going into depth and uncovering their purpose and gifts and talents and how they can bring into the world.

Jeremy Melder 35:07

That sounds wonderful. Now, I want to encourage everyone to look up. Matthew's book, "The Way of the Courageous Vulnerable". As I said, I'll be putting that on the show notes. So, I'd be putting links to his website and so on. And, Matthew, I want to wish you all the very best. You're a humble man. But you know, you've done a great, you know, I know they've been on your own journey. And you've written this great book, which I'm looking forward to devouring soon. And, and I hope a lot of people do the

same. And you know, those workshops that you're planning to do what sound wonderful, that sounds like a great thing to do. And we should talk offline about that because I'm wanting to do some workshops as well with other people that are that I've interviewed, and do sort of weekend retreat, where people get a bit of a taste of different aspects of, you know, human sustainability and sustainability. So, look, you know, that's something that I'm planning in the future with Beaming Green. So, thank you once again. Thank you, Jeremy. Thank you for listening to this episode of Beaming Green. Okay, you got something out of this episode, we'd love to hear what your biggest takeaway was. There are several ways you can do this. You can leave reviews on Apple podcasts. Or if you have a Facebook, Instagram, or LinkedIn social media page, you can leave a review there. But don't forget to tag us so we can thank you personally. Lastly, go to beaminggreen.com and subscribe to our newsletter and receive free how to be green guide. That Beaming Green we are committed to providing you with a thought provoking, insightful program that inspires you to live your life in accordance with your true nature. And we do this by sharing stories from people that are walking their talk and are committed to living their lives sustainably with their mind, body, and soul, so you can share this with your friends and family and leave. The music for this podcast was created by David Weir.