

Keelan ([00:02](#)):

I remember the day that he finally just broke. He didn't get angry. He didn't throw a fit or anything. He just cried. He just cried. And for all of us, that was an extremely strange thing to see.

Peter ([00:35](#)):

Hello, I'm Peter Gee. Did you know that one in six Tasmanians are a carer? A carer provides unpaid support to a family member, friend, or neighbor with disability mental ill health, chronic or life-limiting illness, or who are frail or aged, or have alcohol or drug dependence. As you'll hear, their stories can be challenging and heartbreaking, but also inspiring and heartwarming. This one in six podcast is presented by Care2Serve, part of the Carers Tasmania Group. Care2Serve is the Tasmanian provider of Carer Gateway, an Australian government program offering free services and support for family and friend carers.

Keelan ([01:24](#)):

Hello, my name's Keelan. I live in Blackman's Bay Tasmania. And I care for my father, Paul

Peter ([01:30](#)):

Keelan, thanks for joining us.

Keelan ([01:32](#)):

No, thank you for having me on.

Peter ([01:33](#)):

How do you think about being referred to as a carer? Is it something that you've had right through your 20 years of life, or is it a recent sort of realisation that that's part of what I do.

Keelan ([01:47](#)):

I think about it and I've been one my whole life for my father to an extent for my mother as emotional support. But yeah, for my father, I've been one practically my whole life. It never really had a title or a name for it. But yeah, I suppose that's really what it is.

Peter ([02:07](#)):

Can you tell us about your family? Who lives in your household? What's been your upbringing?

Keelan ([02:14](#)):

Okay, so I suppose I come from a family of three boys, two older brothers, myself, my father, my mother, and at one point for 10 years, we had my mother's mother live with us, so my grandmother. But as for background, my parents are from New Zealand. So in some regard, I am half Maori, half indigenous from my mother's side, and on my father's side, partially Italian, and Chinese, and Samoan.

Peter ([02:48](#)):

That's a decent mixture.

Keelan ([02:50](#)):

Yeah, I get that a lot, like a bit of a fruit salad some people say.

Peter (02:56):

You say that in your family or is it just that's just normal?

Keelan (02:58):

It's just normal for me. I never really grew up with much of my dad's heritage very much, mainly my mother's. So yeah.

Peter (03:08):

But you haven't always lived in Tasmania?

Keelan (03:10):

No, no. I used to live in Melbourne, born and raised there for about eight years.

Peter (03:16):

What brought you to Tassie?

Keelan (03:18):

My father's mental and general health. Also the price of living in Melbourne. For us, it was extreme. My father used to work in construction, and much before that he used to work as a chef in a five star restaurant. As you can imagine, he used to make a lot of money, but with his bipolar... And a lot of these problems, we had no idea up until I was probably around seven and a half to eight years old that he had lots of major depression, anxiety, bipolar, diabetes, all these different things. We didn't really know up until about that point in my life. But with his bipolar, it made him spend as much money as he earned. So a lot of the times we were living off of my mother's wages. There was a lot of fights when I was growing up because of all these different things wrong with my father. Yeah.

Peter (04:23):

Was your mother Donna a peacemaker in that regard?

Keelan (04:26):

She tried. My mother is an absolute saint in that regard. She always tries so hard for everyone, whether it's her own family or her friends.

(04:51):

I will say this is that my father is a very kind and caring man. He is a very kind and caring, and hardworking, and extremely strong, extremely strong to be able to go through the life that he did for all of his life. And trying to raise three kids, trying to make sure that they're all well fed, make sure there's money in the house so then everyone has a roof over their head. So I'll give that to my father. I'll give all that to my father. I appreciate a lot of the things that he tried to do for us, even though he wasn't well.

Peter (05:34):

When did your mum and you decide that we need to combine our talents to look after your father in that way?

Keelan (05:42):

Oh, probably by the time I was eight. Yeah, about seven and a half to eight years old when we really found out what was wrong. Yeah, it sort of became a bit of a, okay, we need to work together to try and make sure that he's okay and do what we can.

Peter (06:09):

So was he still going to work at that stage?

Keelan (06:11):

No.

Peter (06:11):

Really. So he could not work anymore?

Keelan (06:13):

No.

Peter (06:13):

So your mother is actually the bread winner?

Keelan (06:15):

Yeah.

Peter (06:17):

And how did you divvy up helping your dad at home? When your mum was out at work, what was he doing?

Keelan (06:27):

So the first, I'd say three or four years of us living here, he spent a lot of time in hospital, so not traditional hospital, but mental healthcare hospital. So a lot of the times he was getting treatment there, so he wasn't really at home for me to really look after him. It wasn't only until I was probably about 12 to 13 when he started staying at home more away from the hospital. So that's when I was able to care for him a bit more, which was a bit difficult because starting high school and going through puberty, you're trying to understand a lot of different things yourself, understand the world for yourself. And then trying to look after someone else, it's very difficult. And you're met with so many different people through high school. And there's a lot of negativity in high school I found. So yeah, it was rough.

Peter (07:30):

Were you able to put it aside when you got home and?

Keelan (07:33):

I'd always try my best. I had a lot of bullying issues at school, so it sort of became a lot harder by the time I was about 14. But I'd always try my hardest to try and put whatever was at school, at school, and make sure that everyone else was doing okay.

Peter (07:58):

What were your older brothers doing at this stage?

Keelan (08:01):

Oh, my older brothers, well, my oldest brother, he moved out because by that point... How old was he when I was about seven or eight? He would've been about 23, 22. So he was probably living with his at the time, girlfriend back in Melbourne. And my other older brother, he was a bit of a rebel with a cause per se. So he'd always stay out late trying to do whatever fun thing he could at that time, being a 17 to 18 year old kid, just trying to find his way.

Peter (08:45):

But he's not with you anymore?

Keelan (08:48):

No, no. So three years ago he passed away from cancer. That was a long battle for him because as I said, when I was about 14, it was really rough because that's about the time that he was diagnosed with stomach cancer. And for our family, that was quite devastating. For my father it was very hard to understand. Like, where did things go wrong? And after he passed away, it was a lot harder on him as well.

Peter (09:22):

So he had his mental health and then all of a sudden he loses one of his sons. I guess he wasn't that equipped to handle that, not that anybody ever is.

Keelan (09:34):

No. And he tries to cope with it, but it's extremely hard. It's extremely hard.

Peter (09:45):

When you've got that tragedy in your family and you've got your father with his issues, is it time to try and look outside the family for some support?

Keelan (09:57):

I have a good circle of friends that I've met through Young Carers or Carers Gateway in the past, and I also used to go to primary school with them. So they were a good source of... How do I put it? Sort of-

Peter (10:14):

Peer support?

Keelan (10:15):

Yes, that.

Peter (10:16):

Are they in a similar situation to you, these young carers?

Keelan ([10:20](#)):

One of my friends, he has a older brother with autism. And then my other friend, she used to look after her stepfather.

Peter ([10:33](#)):

So you just unburdened on each other sort of thing, did you?

Keelan ([10:37](#)):

Sometimes, it's sometimes like that. But in other cases, you just hang out to forget about things for a little while. And yeah.

Peter ([10:48](#)):

How would you describe your day-to-day caring for your father now? What sort of things do you do for him?

Keelan ([10:54](#)):

Well, the good thing is that he does a lot of things for himself. But other than that, for what I actually do for him is make sure he is eating his breakfast, lunch, dinner. Make sure he is taking his tablets. Just very small things because yeah, again, he does a lot of things for himself.

Peter ([11:14](#)):

Okay. So you just have to really double check that he's done these things?

Keelan ([11:17](#)):

Yeah. Or else he ends up having a high pole and that's never great. There was one time where he collapsed on the floor and that was an episode of a day.

Peter ([11:29](#)):

So you keep that one in your memory banks for the next time.

Keelan ([11:32](#)):

Yeah.

Peter ([11:34](#)):

And your mum, is she physically and mentally well and able to make a contribution?

Keelan ([11:40](#)):

Yes, she is perfectly fine.

Peter ([11:43](#)):

And where are you with your life now? Are you where you hope to be as a young man at this stage, at 20 years? Have you finished your schooling? Are you looking ahead to employment?

Keelan ([11:54](#)):

It's strange. I've thought about this before. And I think about what would myself as a kid say about where I thought I would be at 20. And I am nowhere near where I thought I'd be at 20. When you're a kid, you sort of think, oh, I'll have a house, I'll have lots of money, I'll have my car, I'll have this and that, but no. I'm quite happy. I'm not where I thought I'd be when I was four. But I'm pretty happy. I do fencing as a little hobby, for sword fighting fencing. I go to the gym every so often just to sort of unwind. I like to play the guitar and ukulele. It's a nice little way to relax.

Peter ([12:44](#)):

How do you make ends meet?

Keelan ([12:46](#)):

I'm currently doing a TAFE course, assistant teaching, so I'm working in classrooms. So hopefully I will get some employment in that part-time soon. And in the meantime, still doing carers sort of stuff.

Peter ([13:01](#)):

So in your placements so far, are you using some of the skills you learnt in being a carer?

Keelan ([13:07](#)):

Definitely.

Peter ([13:07](#)):

Yeah. Really?

Keelan ([13:08](#)):

Yeah, because you find that there's so many kids with different sets of issues and a lot of them can be mental issues. So you try and remember things that you've been through, try and remember things that you've had to do as a carer to try and help out these kids.

Peter ([13:30](#)):

So you see yourself as getting qualifications in this and actually using it in the classroom?

Keelan ([13:36](#)):

Yeah.

Peter ([13:37](#)):

How far away do you reckon you are?

Keelan ([13:39](#)):

Oh, the course ends at the end of the year. So yeah, we'll see how I do.

Peter ([13:46](#)):

Do you tell your friends that don't know anything about your background, that this is what I do at home? I'm looking after my dad.

Keelan ([13:54](#)):

I usually tell my friends if I feel safe enough to, because you never really know how people will react. There's been a couple of bad reactions a couple times when I was younger. I never really understood why, because you're helping your parents, but it is what it is. But generally everyone's pretty all right with it.

Peter ([14:23](#)):

So do you think your dad's now in a good enough place that you can now look to move ahead with your career?

Keelan ([14:29](#)):

Oh, definitely. Definitely. There was a lot of time spent for me looking after the people in my household. And the one thing that my older brother that passed and my mother, they used to get scared for me in the fact that I wouldn't do anything outside of being a carer, that I wouldn't have an opportunity to live my life to the fullest.

([15:07](#)):

I'm just 20 now and I've got so much of my life ahead of me. I want to at least do a couple of things for myself, like traveling overseas, I suppose at least going to a couple tournaments of fencing of which that's coming Sunday.

Peter ([15:26](#)):

That's great. So you're going into state to actually fence? Wow.

Keelan ([15:30](#)):

Yeah, it's a very exciting thing for me. Very exciting. Yeah, I used to do swimming competitively, but I never got that far.

Peter ([15:38](#)):

Do you think some people feel guilty about wanting those sort of things that are in your position? "No, I've got to push that urge down because I've got more important things to do at home."

Keelan ([15:51](#)):

Yeah, no, I completely understand that thought of mind. I used to envy a lot of people that would have that sort of freedom, especially when I got into college. So that was really only a few years now. But yeah, high school, college, I used to envy a lot of people that would be able to go out to parties or go out and I suppose live their life.

Peter ([16:24](#)):

They didn't have the responsibilities that you had and couldn't appreciate them?

Keelan ([16:29](#)):

Yeah. Yeah.

Peter ([16:29](#)):

What about when a partner comes along and you're looking perhaps to move out of home, is that going to be a real wrench for you?

Keelan ([16:38](#)):

I think when that time comes, I think things will be okay. My mum should be able to handle it by herself by that point, but it doesn't mean I won't drop in every so often to just make sure everything's okay.

Peter ([16:52](#)):

So do you feel like you're past the worst in looking after your father?

Keelan ([16:58](#)):

Definitely. Yeah.

Peter ([17:00](#)):

Why, is that your doing, because you've done such a good job?

Keelan ([17:03](#)):

Ah.

Peter ([17:04](#)):

Come on.

Keelan ([17:05](#)):

I don't want to pat my back that bad, or that much. But no, honestly, it's been an effort between my mother, myself, and my father of course, is that of course, without his own efforts, he wouldn't be as good mentally as what he would be.

Peter ([17:27](#)):

So when he was working hard, he would overload himself?

Keelan ([17:31](#)):

Oh yeah, definitely.

Peter ([17:32](#)):

Would he mentally?

Keelan ([17:32](#)):

Yeah, of course, yeah. I wouldn't be able to really understand fully the amount of mental and emotional toll that working those hours did for him, working under construction. He used to be on top of the really big cranes. He used to go on top of those and he used to do lots of crazy things, lots of scary things like that. But he used to love it for some reason. And my mum would always tell me that when he would work, he would work like 10 men.

Peter ([18:09](#)):

But that took a toll on him because physically, yes, he might have been able to cope, but mentally he couldn't?

Keelan ([18:16](#)):

No. By the end, no. I remember the day that he finally just broke. He didn't get angry, he didn't throw a fit or anything, he just cried. He just cried. And for all of us, that was an extremely strange thing to see. As I said before, for him to take that long to break, impressive but-

Peter ([18:52](#)):

You can only battle your demon so long?

Keelan ([18:54](#)):

Yeah.

Peter ([19:07](#)):

As a young carer, have you got any advice for anybody that thinks, "My situation's a little bit like Keelan's here," that you could pass on to them?

Keelan ([19:17](#)):

Things do get better. Things will get better. When you've got time, make time for having friends and hanging out with them at school. Make sure you have time for yourself. Do things that you love to do. Find a passion of something that you'd like to pursue. As I've mentioned before, I've recently found fencing and that's become quite a big passion for me at this moment in time.

Peter ([19:52](#)):

And it hasn't impinged on you caring?

Keelan ([19:54](#)):

No. No, because it only runs a couple times a week, and it's a couple of hours, so it's not too much. And I've got friends online and I actually do something sort of similar to a podcast. But have you ever heard of Twitch streaming?

Peter ([20:13](#)):

No.

Keelan ([20:14](#)):

No?

Peter ([20:15](#)):

You're lost me there. Explain.

Keelan ([20:17](#)):

No, it's sort of like a podcast, but you are sort of doing a live video thing of yourself doing whatever. You can play a game, or play music, or just talk.

Peter ([20:30](#)):

How often do you do this?

Keelan ([20:32](#)):

Whenever I've got time. So it might be like once a week. I might play a game with one of my friends online.

Peter ([20:42](#)):

Anyone can tune in and watch it.

Keelan ([20:44](#)):

Yeah.

Peter ([20:44](#)):

Really?

Keelan ([20:46](#)):

Yeah, it's a fun way to just hang out and gain a bit of an audience. And I just do it for myself. And just find something in life that you love, pursue it, and you never know how far you're going to get.

Peter ([21:03](#)):

And an organisation like Care2Serve, Carer Gateway, where's its role in that?

Keelan ([21:11](#)):

They organise getaways where you can hang out with other people in a similar situation to yourself, or someone different, someone in a different situation to yourself, that falls under the role of being a carer. That you can do things like bowling or going to the gold class movies. You can go for a camping trip for a couple of nights. There's lots of different activities that I've gone to do through Carer Gateway since I was probably eight or nine.

Peter ([21:46](#)):

So they've provided that respite for you without you even really realising that what it was?

Keelan ([21:51](#)):

Yeah. And you meet a lot of fantastic people through those getaways and those activities. And yeah, it's just a nice way to get out of the usual home mindset and just hang out with people your own age or around, and yeah, have fun.

Peter ([22:15](#)):

Keelan, thank you very much. I think what we can see is light at the end of the tunnel here for you and your whole family, and that must be very satisfying for you.

Keelan ([22:24](#)):

Yeah. Thank you very much for having me on here, Peter.

Peter ([22:33](#)):

If you care for a family member or friend, Carer Gateway can help. Carer Gateway can support you to navigate the maze of supports, connect with other carers, talk to someone confidentially, get help with your caring role, support with your goals and residential or emergency respite, all for free. Call 1 800 422 737 and press one. Or go to carergateway.gov.au. Carer Gateway is open Monday to Friday, 8:00 AM to 5:00 PM.

([23:06](#)):

If you've enjoyed this podcast, share it on your social media channels or tell a friend who could benefit from it and enjoy listening to it. I'm Peter Gee. Thanks for listening.