

GED_S01E17_The_Good_Enough_Dad_Mitch

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Female voice: [00:00:02] A Listener Production.

Maggie Dent: [00:00:04] This podcast was recorded on the ancient lands of the Gadigal peoples of the Eora nation in Australia. I wish to acknowledge their rich and continuing culture, and especially pay respect to the elders past, present and emerging, and to acknowledge and pay respect to any First Nations people from anywhere in the world who may come to hear this podcast. We hope that we may all come to walk with gentle feet, strong minds and compassionate hearts in this global village.

Maggie Dent: [00:00:36] No one wants to be a lousy dad. Aiming to be a good dad is great, but do you know what? Being a good enough dad is so much more important. I'm Maggie Dent, parenting educator, author, and champion of boys and men. And this is The Good Enough Dad where I chat with committed, caring, sometimes confused, and often funny dads about all the ways they've discovered to be good enough at this parenting gig. My good enough dead. Today is Mitch Tambo.

Mitch Tambo: [00:01:20] Mitch Tambo singing "You're the Voice" in Gadigal language

Maggie Dent: [00:01:33] Oh still hits me in the feels. I remember the first time I saw Mitch singing that version of You're The Voice on Australia's Got Talent and the goosebumps and I think the the other one that really sticks in my heart is the Fire Fight concert with John Farnham. And then even Olivia Newton-John came on at the end. Man, I was just sobbing with how amazing that was. So Mitch is [00:02:00] a proud Gamilaraay man, and his pride in his culture and his passion for unity deeply infuses the work he does. It's something that filters through his love for his family; his wife Lele, his step-daughters Sofiana Ofa, Kalani and daughter Phoenix. Mitch, welcome to the good enough dad.

Mitch Tambo: [00:02:21] Yama Yama. Thanks for having me.

Maggie Dent: [00:02:24] Now give us an idea of what this morning was like in the family home. Was there kind of calmness or chaos?

Mitch Tambo: [00:02:32] Look, I've got to say, you said in the intro it was a beautiful intro, but I just want to make mention. You said you know Mitch's beautiful step daughters, Sofiana, Ofa, Kalani and his daughter Phoenix. And I just got to say, off the bat, with my utmost respect, they are all 1,000% my beautiful daughters, step daughters, blood, not blood, whatever. They're my beautiful cherubs and I'm really blessed to have them in my house. And this morning, you know, when I got up to try and beat peak hour traffic, one was off to school, one was getting ready for school, one was doing their hair and the other was waking up, running around the house saying good morning in a nice, beautiful, sweet scream to everyone. So that's what was happening in my house. And I was pouring bottles of water in backpacks, getting ready for a hot, beautiful day. So that's what was going on.

Maggie Dent: [00:03:21] I love that and thank you for that, because that's really what I hear a lot of times from dads who've been on the journey a lot to saying, you know, when they're in my home, they're mine. And that word we don't need sometimes people call it a bonus dad. And I think that's kind of sweet, too.

Maggie Dent: [00:03:36] You were raised by your single mum in Tamworth. Tell me, what were some of the adventures you would have got up to as a kid growing up in the country?

Mitch Tambo: [00:03:44] Look, growing up in the country, in reflection, I think you have to leave sometimes to really realise how incredible it was. And for me, you know, just swimming in the river, um, taking long walks into the bush, exploring all that kind of thing. I think I look back on it, [00:04:00] it was just such a blessing to grow up that way. Just an outdoors kid, you know, crashing bikes, Band-Aids on knees, elbows. That was kind of my upbringing. Lots of sports, lots of culture, dancing, going to schools, all that kind of thing. It was just a great way to grow up.

Maggie Dent: [00:04:14] Tell me, how much did you see of your dad in that time, and did he have much of an influence on you as you became a man?

Mitch Tambo: [00:04:22] Yeah. Look, I seen my dad. I don't know, like, let's just say once every ten weeks for a week. He lives like maybe three and a half, four hours away. So I saw him most school holidays for a week or two, maybe a couple of weeks over Christmas. And then he unfortunately passed away when I was, uh, 22. So, uh, I saw him maybe not often to a lot of people, but to me, in reflection, enough for me to have really fond memories and for me to have a real appreciation for the input he has had in my life. Because you don't realise until you sort of get older and you have certain phrases or sentences or conversations that are really indented in your head that pop up quite often. So I am really thankful for that.

Maggie Dent: [00:05:05] Oh, I love that. I've got some from my dad as well that are just pure classic. Only could have come from my dad. So was there another stronger male role model that may have influenced you a bit more than your dad?

Mitch Tambo: [00:05:20] It's interesting. I lived with my pop. Uh, I live with him from maybe the age five, six to about give or take 15. I live with my grandparents and mum, so he was a constant male role model, um, in my life. Gave me the first shave, all that kind of thing. But he was, you know, from the old school, born in the 40s. So he didn't say too much. It's not like we had in-depth birds and the bees convos and talked about this and that. It wasn't really about that. It was just more, the principles that I learned is let your handshake be your handshake. You tell someone you're going to do something, do it. You know, if I was coughing up my guts, sick with the flu, and I didn't want to go to rep basketball training and be like, well, you're not training, but you can go and [00:06:00] sit and watch them train because you've made a commitment to the team. And when you say something, you follow it through. So it was kind of those old school morals, you know, never lay a hand on a woman, never touch a kid.

Mitch Tambo: [00:06:10] If you're, you know, courting, dating someone, you make sure you open up the door for them. It was that kind of thing. With my my dad, my "dad, dad". It was more about him and me being kind of later on in life, best mates. I think we were really good mates. Before he passed away, we had a great relationship in terms of, you know, we talk once a week and really have long, lengthy conversations. We shared great moments, camping, surfing, that kind of a thing. And I think maybe he felt that's all it could be because he wasn't in my life flat out. So when we were together, it was more about giving me great experiences and having those encounters. And that's kind of how

it was, where my pop was kind of more, you know, if mum couldn't do it, he would take me to training. He would drop me off, he'd pick me up from school or this or that if it had to be done. So he was kind of he was there, you know what I mean?

Maggie Dent: [00:06:51] Yeah. So in my extensive travels, I've spent a lot of time in remote communities, and there was a really big influence of the uncles in many of the, you know, communities I visited. Did you have any uncle who was in that space?

Mitch Tambo: [00:07:04] No I had an uncle, but not not present, but had extended community and family that were absolutely incredible and really pivotal in my upbringing and where I would sort of end up, I think, in my course of life, just by being around strong men that were doing great things in community.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:21] You had a pretty strong auntie too, who influenced you at one point, didn't she?

Mitch Tambo: [00:07:25] Aunt Bernadette? So I'm still, you know, with Aunt Bernadette all the time talking, writing, music, you know, incredible elder, um, incredible person who's out there in Boggabilla and many again, like of uncles as well, that you don't realize until you look back and you reflect and you go, wow, it was that it was literally that moment or that interaction that really like, wow, here I am. You know, as a dad, married years have gone by and I'm thinking about that interaction.

Maggie Dent: [00:07:54] You've previously said that you started to feel a strong pull towards your culture when you were about 15, which [00:08:00] is actually a time where all teens start saying, who am I? What's my sense of identity? Can you walk me through how that woke you and how you searched for that part of you?

Mitch Tambo: [00:08:10] As a young person I was always proud to be First Nations, you know, Aboriginal Gamilaraay always really proud. But it wasn't until I experienced corroboree for the first time and was just like, wow. Like the feeling I got was just, I need to do this. I can't not do it. So I just got into it and we ended up jumping on board, um, with the the brothers from a local high school who would go into combat against each other playing basketball every Wednesday night. And I just said, look, man, I need to do this. And, um, it was it was really funny because the a couple of the brothers, they'd get

their hair braided and look really deadly, like, it was really nice braids, all patterns and things. And I had like an afro. I had this big curly mop of hair and I was like, I need... Who's that sister doing the hair? I need her to do my hair. So it started off with that. She braided up my hair one afternoon and the brothers, they knew that, um, we'd go into combat. They were very fond of me because we'd just go into battle. And I remember we just kicked back and played heaps of basketball that afternoon, and I started playing for their side. I'm in a men's comp and then next minute I'm dancing with them and we're going everywhere. And I'm starting to learn our law, our culture and the stories and the songs, and we just go everywhere. And it was just so incredible. I knew from 15 before I even linked up with these lads that this is what I want for the rest of my life. This is all I want to do is share and understand who I am, and that's really it.

Maggie Dent: [00:09:37] That is such a critical window in a boy's life. On that journey over the bridge to manhood. And yes, when there is a crossroad, really, really big anchoring into something that holds you, you become untethered.

Mitch Tambo: [00:09:49] So I don't know what would have happened if I didn't find culture, to be honest, because, uh, my personality is very much I'm in 1,000% either which way, whatever we're doing, I'm in. And, [00:10:00] um, I know that if I didn't find culture, it could have just been a completely different story for me. Because you're right, at 15, you're testing the boundaries. You want that independence, but you can't quite have it yet. You're feeling, whether you're being respected or not respected by a teacher, if they really care or don't care, you know, you start to become awake. There's all these different things. And for me to have been exposed to my culture at that level at that age, it really set me up for where I am today. It's undeniably the truth, you know.

Maggie Dent: [00:10:33] When did the music arrive in your life and when did you find out you had that fabulous voice?

Mitch Tambo: [00:10:41] Music was always around me, obviously, you know, growing up, traditional songs and things, but I was always like the didg player or the dancer. I never really sung. I would sing if there was no one else around and I just had to get it done. Mum was into musicals, so, you know, it was always music at family barbecues, but never in a million years was interested, not in a negative way, I just wasn't interested that I would sing like, you know, I just knew I wanted to do culture and I wanted to

actually dance. I wanted to be a dancer. But look, I can barely touch my toes as it is. So that wasn't going to happen. So I had a friend or I have a friend, great, great mate of mine, Dan. And he said to me one day, you should get a loop pedal. I'm like, bro, what's a loop pedal? And he said, it's this thing where you just layer on top of like, what Ed Sheeran does live in concert. You just you record, you layer record and you do it all live. And I said, well, what for? I don't do anything. And he said, you, you beatbox, you play didg, you know you can play an all right Cajon, I think you'd be great. And at the time I was doing lots of, um, cultural stuff and it was kind of touristy and people always wanted a CD or something from me, and I never had anything. Couldn't be. I just wasn't interested. Anyway. I said, look, if you set the thing up for me, I'll buy it, no worries. And I was living in this, uh, two bedroom apartment by myself unit.

Mitch Tambo: [00:11:54] And I got it. He set it up in my kitchen, and within seven days I'd written my first EP and I decided that [00:12:00] I would, uh, sing on it, so I start. I was jamming didge and stuff. I thought, this just isn't me. I think I want to sing and I want to sing, you know, tell my story. So in seven days I had written seven tracks. And before I moved out to Uluru to be like a wellbeing coordinator out there, I was like, hey, uh, to my same mate, I've heard about these awards, the Nima Awards or something like National Indigenous Music Awards. I didn't know anything like I was pretty fresh, so to speak. So I actually thought I had a shot. And, uh, how do you do this? Well, you need a triple J unearthed account. What's triple J unearthed? What's this? So he set me up. I put these two songs up, moved back to Melbourne about six months later to host a kids TV series. And I was driving down the freeway and I started getting emails. You've been Triple J's Unearthed artist of the week. Um, you know, in the top five must hear First Nations artist. This award, that award. And next minute people wanted to hear me sing. And I just couldn't believe it. So I just I rang him again, like, what do we do? And I come up with all these crazy ideas that he nearly hung up on the phone on me because it's so left field, because he's an incredible muso. So I'm just going against the grain. Yeah. And, uh, we made it happen, and I just started to learn how to sing.

Maggie Dent: [00:13:11] Wow. And how old were you again?

Mitch Tambo: [00:13:13] So I did that around. I'm going to say 2016/17 around there. And then before I knew it, I was on Australia's Got Talent and and it was all all happening within, well, well within sort of that four year kind of span and I maybe done,

like, uh, give or take 3 or 4 live performances in my music life, you know? And that was it. And I just decided to go for it and had no idea of what lies ahead and what I would sort of jump into.

Maggie Dent: [00:13:44] Yeah, yeah. Did the girls love having you, you know, as a dad, as a singer and a muso? I mean, do you matter more than The Wiggles for Little Phoenix?

Mitch Tambo: [00:13:53] It's so funny you say that. With Fifi, she's very much went through a phase. She still does it. Where [00:14:00] it was like she would sit on my lap and ask for dad, and I'm like, well, dad's here, or you want you want dad in the bright colors and the headdress that, you want that dad do you? Dad, dad, dad, dad, dad pointing to the screen. And I would have to sit through all my variations of my songs and everyone had to anyone. Like whether it was, uh, my wife's mum, she would have to sit through it and to the point where she'd be like, wow, son, I didn't realise you did that interview. In this interview, I'm like, I did that a while ago. She says, yeah, well, we have to sit through every single clip or song of you on YouTube all day. I drop her, drop her off and go and do some work or something, and they'd be stuck with me regardless, you know, and even her sisters and that they're like, what do you do today, Sofi? Yeah. We watched you okay. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:14:41] Oh. That is. Oh, my God, that is so gorgeous.

Maggie Dent: [00:14:50] You've mentioned that your dad died when you were around 22, and you've said that before, that if you were given one thing you could do over again, it would be to surf with your dad. And, yeah, there's something pretty special, isn't there, in nature. But talk to me about why that was pretty special for you being in the water with him.

Mitch Tambo: [00:15:08] I think it's just something we we shared. He taught me how to surf. Every time I was with him, we would spend probably hours in the water as I got older, like, maybe, you know, 17, 18 somewhere around there. And I could paddle and do it all myself. We would go together and he would have a board, I would have a board. And I just have like fond memories that were just really special, that I really hold in my heart. Whether it's, um, just sitting out, not even catching waves, but just sitting

out there on the board and just talking about nothing and just laughing and that kind of stuff. And it is it's stuff that really sticks with me. And and I didn't really get anything after he passed, like in the physical sense, but I got two surfboards that were his and I, I'm lucky enough that they're surfable and I take them with me here and there. And so it's just something that we really, we share together that I actually do hold close to my heart. It's a it's a special thing [00:16:00] that we had.

Maggie Dent: [00:16:00] It's interesting because all my sons are surfers, and they often say to me that it's waiting for a wave that can be this really sacred place. And whoever you are with, you don't need to talk always. It's just this pause in life.

Mitch Tambo: [00:16:14] It's so special. And I sort of went away. I went away from it for many years. I just had them in storage. It wasn't actually until last year, um, it was my birthday. And Leah rolled up in my car and she put roof racks on it, and she said, you know what? I think you need to get your dad's board and go and spend some time with your dad. And I was like, wow, this is pretty deep because I'm talking years, like I haven't surfed in years. So she actually had an Airbnb with the kids and we went away and I jumped on, jumped on that board. And it was so funny how grief operates, because within a space of like five hours, I went through so many emotions. One was like, oh, it's all too hard. I couldn't be bothered. Let's make it about the kids. And I realized I became aware, like, man, this is grief. Like, this is your grief. You have to get the board and you have to do this because you need to push through this. This is actually grief rearing its head. And I jumped on like the first wave and I just felt so alive. I felt like I could hear him, like screaming like I would when we surf, like, woo. Yeah. You know, and, uh, I was like, wow, I've got to do this.

Mitch Tambo: [00:17:13] And all year I've tried to make pivotal times where I go and I surf and do things that really nurture and look after, like, almost like that 12 year old, that 14 year old boy inside of me. I've become accustomed this year to trying to try and really, um, celebrate him and allow him to just be young, which is weird as a, as a dad, but I feel like it really serves me well. So I went and I was like, I rang up my wife and I said, Lele, I think I want to buy a surfboard. Like, I've actually never owned a board in my life. They're always dad's boards, but I've always really wanted to surf. But as a boy, I lived in the bush and I'd just come see him and it was my step brothers that surfed, but I really wanted that. They got surfboards, I got a scooter and she's like, just do it. You

just need to do this. So I went and bought this surfboard, got out in the water with it, and it's all these crazy things, that [00:18:00] dude, they tie you back to your dad and it's grief and it's all these things, and you start to walk in it just a little bit, and you start to feel so light and so alive again in different parts of your life. It's crazy.

Maggie Dent: [00:18:10] I think there's something really interesting that you've touched on about grief. You know, it's something I've worked a lot in. Is that the things that you used to do with the person you've lost, who you loved early on, hurt. It would have been too hard, right? It's like me listening to seekers songs after my dad died. I just couldn't do it. And then when you've grieved enough, then you step into those places and you get just joy. But you can't get there until you've grieved. You've got to have cried and just felt the pain in your heart. And then if that lifts, then you're able to experience this incredible connection, because really, we've only lost the physical of them.

Mitch Tambo: [00:18:44] That's it, that's it. And it's really interesting because you feel great. And then we have Phoenix. And now I go through spouts I'm like, wow, he would have been like such a great pop. Wow, I wish they met. It just would have been so. He would have been so hands on. It just would have been amazing. And you ride through that and you go, well, it's all right. I know that they're around and all that. But it's funny because as you grow and you develop and things happen in life, there is moments you go, man, it would have been really cool for you to be here for that.

Maggie Dent: [00:19:18] Can you remember when you suddenly stepped into becoming a stepdad to three girls? Because prior to meeting Lele, you were a single man... Tell me about that journey.

Mitch Tambo: [00:19:30] Look, I was just a single brother, you know, in Melbourne, I probably a couple of years prior finished my degree or something, and I was doing cultural education shows, just travelling around schools. And I may have just sort of done the EP and me and Lele got talking and I obviously realized she was, uh, older than me, and she had kids, and I was like, okay, this is full on in the sense of, well, I know what it's like to not have a dad. And I ask all the questions, is their dad present [00:20:00] or this and that which he is and he's in their life, which I honestly I think is amazing. I think that's great. But it was more than anything, can I do it? Like you're saying to yourself, talking like man, like, dude, it's big. This is big, man. Like, this isn't

about just dating someone. It's about young people's little hearts and lives and school drop offs and pick ups and 1000 different commitments that obviously I just, I didn't have to think of and I didn't care about because it wasn't my life. Just I was doing my thing. It was like, if I want to go to Japan tomorrow because a gig come up and the gig is worth nothing in money, I can just do it as long as they pay for flights, you know, like it's a very free, free life, you know, it's pretty chill.

Mitch Tambo: [00:20:41] But I wasn't doing much because I was very committed to what I was doing in terms of my work and really passionate. It's not like I was jet setting or anything. I really wasn't unless it was work. But the more I got to know Lele and obviously fall in love and all that kind of thing. It was really her belief in me that allowed me to keep walking in it because geez, how can I see myself in this when it's like, you know, I'm very real, so it's like, yeah, it's all good, you can build yourself up and I can do it, but really, man, can you do it? It's a big call. And it wasn't anything to do with the girls, their personalities or anything like that. It was all to do with me and my own self-doubt and my own disbelief and whether I could actually do it. And Leah would be like, so chill about it. I could just be, uh, having a moment. Are you serious? Like, you sure you want to be with, you know, like I don't.

Mitch Tambo: [00:21:26] And she'd just be like, Mitch. I've seen like, you're incredible. Yeah. You've got such an amazing heart. You're going to be just fine. You just need to relax. And as soon as you relax and chill. The kids will feel that and it'll be all good, you know. But but she would say it so like not blasé, but so relaxed. And sometimes that would gee me up a bit too, because I'm like, you're so chilled about it, this isn't a chilled situation. And then we just stepped into it, you know? And the more that I let go, the better it got. But sometimes it's really hard to let go, [00:22:00] just learn. And I'd come from also a background that was very male dominant. Like obviously I grew up with mum and my nan present, but I didn't have sisters. Um, I had three step brothers on my dad's side and a whole bunch of brother boys that were friends, and I was in a obviously a male dance troupe and sport. And so it was it was a big shift, you know, where it's not like I could just go, let's go, and let's go for a run and a kick of the footy.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:25] So one of the things that we know is that male self-worth is often dependent on whether I see I've done good. So you can see that there's a part of you wondering if I mucked this up, then it's, you know, I've got a lot at stake here

because you can see the reluctance, but fortunately, 100% you were able to step right in there.

Maggie Dent: [00:22:44] Okay. So then Phoenix has turned up. And, um, how was it with a brand new baby? What was that journey like for you being around the other girls and loving them totally.

Mitch Tambo: [00:22:55] Completely brand new. I mean, with the girls. There's fear, the doubt and all these things that run through your head. But it's completely opposite to having Phoenix with the girls. It's like, how does it work? I was similar in the sense of my parents split. How does it work? You know, the dad's present. Am I going to be a good step dad? Will they accept me? Will I be good enough? All of those, just all self doubt. But it's actually nothing to do with the girls because the girls are beautiful. With Phoenix. It's like. I don't want to screw this up. I have never dealt with a baby before. Okay. Changing nappies, sleepless nights, all of these other questions. That's a whole nother level of fear too. And self-doubt. And again, the more I let go and just become sort of present, as in like, just be and just be, then it was all good. And Lele would be like, I'd be like, you've done this before. And she said, no, every baby's different. Mm. This is new for me too. So we have to go on this together and it's all good. But if you have questions, blah, blah, blah, you can ask me. And I [00:24:00] attribute it all really to Lele because she's been so unconditional and loving with me, and it's just allowed me to actually let go and not be rushed to find my feet, but just to step it out. And and I've found my feet and, you know, I really do in my household.

Mitch Tambo: [00:24:15] I've literally got four different relationships and they all fall under four different titles. So Sofi will call me dad, Ofa calls me Mitch, Killarni calls me Uncle dad, and Phoenix calls me daddy. And there are four different relationships and and I've learnt, you know, that that's an amazing thing. It's all. It's all different. And the relationships don't have to be all strong in one certain point. They all have their unique, beautiful place and and I've learnt so much and grown so much because of all four of them.

Maggie Dent: [00:24:44] So I'm going to throw back to what you said about Lele when she was convincing you you could do it, and she said you had a good heart. Yeah, right. Well, the good heart is exactly what every child needs. Can you love me unconditionally

and ferociously. And you. Obviously. That's that's why it'll work, regardless of biological and non-biological. Oh. So did you have any thought about what sort of a dad you wanted to be before you became one?

Mitch Tambo: [00:25:21] A present dad. A dad that is around. My main thing. And I'm so imperfect with it all. And sometimes when I get on myself and a bit negative, I pull myself back to that and go, man, you're here and you're here every day. And that's all that matters because. It sucked not having my dad present. When I look back in this moment with you... As a kid, you only know what you know, so it doesn't suck. It's just life. And you don't realize that you're from a broken home and you don't realise all these things. It's just life. But when you become, you know, a young adult, you start thinking about these [00:26:00] things. And I was like, I just want to be present. I just want to be around.

Mitch Tambo: [00:26:02] And a massive milestone for me, which was a huge milestone, was when Phoenix turned 18 months. And I said to my wife, wow, okay, I did it. She's like, did what? And I'm like, well, dad left when I was 18 months. Oh, wow. And I'm just I'm here and Phoenix is 18 months and we're good and life's good, and I feel really great about that. But I didn't realise it would be a moment for me, but it was a it was a real moment.

Mitch Tambo: [00:26:30] Also watching Phoenix grow and develop because I always thought, you know, he left at 18 months. He missed everything. He wasn't there. Like he just wasn't there. But from born to 18 months, a million things happen. And it like awoken all these questions in me and made me almost feel emotional too, because I was like, wow, dad actually held me and showered with me. He actually was there when I was walking. I would have been yelling out dad, dad, dad, dad, like, there's all these things that would have like he was there. And I kind of started to think like, damn. Like I never got to ask him anything about our relationship living together, even though it was just 18 months. When you become a father and you go through that window like it's actually like a lot happens. I never got to hear him say, oh, man, I hated changing those geez your nappy stunk or I didn't hear any of that, you know, and it all of a sudden become really important to me. Yeah, it's really funny how it all works out and it all sort of comes back, I think a lot to that sort of inner child stuff. You know, it's quite it's really interesting.

Maggie Dent: [00:27:35] He saw your first steps and heard your first words and all of that, and you didn't you didn't kind of realise it..

Mitch Tambo: [00:27:42] Didn't realise it, never thought about it, never thought of his arms. You know, me being just nestled into his arms as a baby like none of that. And all of a sudden you're an adult and they're they're ten years gone. And what does this kind of mean? It's really interesting, the questions it poses.

Maggie Dent: [00:28:01] You've [00:28:00] mentioned some really good things that your, your pop has given you in terms of character building. Was there anything else that you consciously think I've brought forward as a dad from either your dad or your pop or anyone else?

Mitch Tambo: [00:28:15] I didn't realise how much like my dad I am. Um hum. Um, there's lots, lots of him in me that I think you grow up with the single mum, everyone just like you look like her. You are like her because you're with her 24 seven, but no one actually sees your old man because they don't know him. He's not there. So today I really recognise man, I'm my dad in this area. For example, yesterday or last year, I said to her, I said, you know, I want to be an active dad, a present dad. I want to take the kids camping. I want them to be salt water babies. But a lot of my life, I was kind of told that I wasn't that kind of guy, almost like, not that man's man. Maybe I come across a bit artsy or just don't want to get their hands dirty. And I love it. Like my dad was very much that take camping and so active, so into it, super sporty and all rounder, all these things. And last year we took the kids camping and I'm chucking up all the tents, setting everything up, driving a thousand loads of car stuff in there, getting everything ready, pumping up paddle boards, surfboards, kayaks.

Mitch Tambo: [00:29:21] We're into it. And I'm like, wow, this is all my dad. Yeah. This isn't yeah, there's no one else around. This is dad. You know, this is what dad did for us. And although I wasn't with him every day, those moments really stuck with me. And we emulated a picture of dad and I and me and Phoenix last year of him and me with a surfboard, and then me and Phoenix with the surfboard. And it's just really, I'm not going out of my way to be him or to emulate them moments or recreate. It's just who I am, too. Yeah, and I love that because I get to carry him with me in that aspect, as I carry other

traits of family and stuff with me. But it's really beautiful [00:30:00] being a kid that never had him present every day and only had limited experiences, that I have really strong memories and really strong, beautiful, positive traits of him I get to carry.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:13] Oh, that's that's so beautiful. And you didn't know really until you stepped into that same role. It's beautiful.

Mitch Tambo: [00:30:20] No idea.

Maggie Dent: [00:30:21] Okay. So is there anything you've consciously chosen not to bring forward from, you know, your pop or your dad?

Mitch Tambo: [00:30:27] Yeah, totally. Heaps. I think pop's generation was very fear driven. They went through a lot, come from quite a poor family, you know, sleeping on like a two bedroom house, 16 kids sleeping with Hessian bags over them on a veranda in the middle of winter, being sent home from school. Frostbite, no shoes. You know, they did it really tough. So I think with that was everything was very like fear based. He taught me a lot of great things. He showed up for me all the time when I needed him. He was always there. But everything I think was fear driven. It was like, you know, no one should sort of leave the nest, go and explore things. You should just have almost like have one job and just that's it. You're secure. Get a house. You know, what's your dream or what? If you broke a leg, you should have a plan B, that kind of thing. So for me, in parenting, I'm very much like, what do you want to do? Let's get it. Let's get it because you only got one shot. So let's just do it. Let's live life. You want to go to the army? How can we make that happen? I try and be very much like that.

Mitch Tambo: [00:31:28] And sometimes, you know, you've got to pull yourself up and recognize some of them traits and go, well, that's not who I am. That's a learned behavior. And I don't want that. And becoming a father and a husband, I'm really open to Lele's feedback and really I try and like sit back, whether it's in the shower or whatever and reflect. Was that really appropriate? Is that a trait that I really need to have? And sometimes a lot of the time it's learnt behaviours and things that you've come up through. From my dad when I was younger, I found him really intimidating and impatient. [00:32:00] And I obviously look back. I'm like, well, he was probably in his late 20s or something. You know, he was just a young fella working it out. But when you're

just a kid, you know, it's like you're David and they're Goliath. You know, it's so intimidating. And I realised that as he got older, he really went through self-reflection. And I just remember he definitively just changed. So from that side, it's just you get impatient, you have these moments. And if that does happen, I try to always end the night positively. Even sometimes. If you got to say sorry, sorry if I was a bit abrupt there, but this is why I was abrupt, because I was concerned that this would happen. And I don't want you to ever feel this or that or blah blah blah, but try and be open and convey, I guess, uh, your emotions and and show the human side of being a parent too, that you're just doing the best you can without trying to heap your own stuff. And it's very layered. I mean, I think my generation and the generations now coming through, it's completely different styles. You know how my parents, parents, it is a reflection of how they were parented and where their parents come weren't easy times necessarily. So, you know, you're just doing the best you can. And I'm grateful for my upbringing. It helped me become the man I am today and where I am, so there's no real regret there or anything like that. I think everyone just does the best they can with what they've got and and that's okay. And as you become an adult, you really you realise that and you're able to reflect and really empathize with your, um, family too. But it just is what it is. Yeah.

Maggie Dent: [00:33:26] Yeah, it is. It is what it is. Oh. So if there's one window that you've found most challenging since you've become a parent, what would that window be? Do you think?

Mitch Tambo: [00:33:43] So are we talking Phoenix or are we talking since having all the girls?

Maggie Dent: [00:33:47] All of the girls? Yeah, from beginning of you becoming a parent.

Mitch Tambo: [00:33:51] Just letting go. That's the hardest thing, period. There's nothing else I could really say. I mean, to anyone [00:34:00] listening out, listening out there. Wow, that's really deep. But it's really hard to let go. Let go of your insecurities. Not take things personally.

Maggie Dent: [00:34:11] Be defensive.

Mitch Tambo: [00:34:13] It's so hard at times. Yeah, when you're new to it. Now I know like, you know, five weeks out when PMS is due, I just feel the energy shift. Not even being smart. I just go, okay, I know what's happening. Where before you're so fresh and new to it all you go, oh, what, you think I'm a jerk?

Maggie Dent: [00:34:28] Yeah.

Mitch Tambo: [00:34:29] What have I done wrong? Like, what's wrong with me me me me me me me me me. And it's like, let go. It's nothing to do with you. You're actually not that special, as special as maybe you thought you were. It's just everyone has a bad day. Someone's navigating through something. Something might have happened at school, over here, over there. Or it's just, you know, at the end of the day, you're a new man in the house, and, um, you just need to relax, breathe and be yourself. And things will iron themselves out as we go, you know? Um, but sometimes it's really hard in those initial phases as, like, a relatively young fellow to, um, just be a young adult and not fall into, like, your kid brain and be reactive and act like a kid, you know, in return. Where now I'm just like. You know, I can go and take a breather and go, you know, like, it could be like, um, Phoenix could be like, we just come out of swimming, and the last thing she wants to do is get in the car, and it could be like, we're going to go into a bit of a tanty or whatever. I've never, like, lost it or got overwhelmed because the change is prior and that is letting go. Don't act like a kid. She's not angry or nothing. She's just trying to express her emotions. So why that happens? I'll just talk in a calm manner and I will breathe though, I'll breathe deeply. I'll go and I'll get through it. And, um, I only it only comes through letting go. It's just. It sounds so easy, but it's not.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:53] You think it's letting go of the male ego?

Mitch Tambo: [00:35:55] Yeah. Let it go, brother. Let it go, bro.

Maggie Dent: [00:35:57] Yeah. Let it go. Yeah. We [00:36:00] all muck up because we know it's human. And, you know, that's the whole point of the podcast is good enough means we'll have these moments. Can you share one of your significant failure moments as a dad? Hmm.

Mitch Tambo: [00:36:18] You know, I like there's nothing wrong with the question. I think when I think I fail, you know, you feel like you fall short all the time. But I've always brought it back to: I'm here and I'm present.

Maggie Dent: [00:36:29] Yeah, so.

Mitch Tambo: [00:36:30] I don't allow myself. To, like, even remotely sit in the thought for a second of being a failure father. Um, and there's been times where I've said to her, I feel this or that, and she just shut it straight down. Won't have a bar of it. My thing is, is I'm here and I'm present and I'm literally doing the best that I can, and, um, whatever I can grow and develop and be better, like, I honestly will, but I just can't say that I'm a failure, dad, because I'm present. If Lele's breastfeeding in bed and I have to, I'll get up. And, you know, the only thing I can't do is hair. I can do, like a standard, like ponytail or whatever, but.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:11] Or two ponytails. Yep. Can't do it.

Mitch Tambo: [00:37:14] And Kalani, she won't have a bar of it now. She's like, nah, it's all good, uncle dad. I'll ask Sofi. She can do my hair.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:19] I love it.

Mitch Tambo: [00:37:20] Go get Sofi out of bed. She can do your hair for school. She's got a late sleep in.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:25] I love it.

Mitch Tambo: [00:37:26] But I love it. You know, like, even last night. Fifi, she, uh. Lele. We were at the beach. Lele plaited up her hair and she's like, da da da off, off, off. And she said on my lap. And I'm like, man, in a million years, I never would have thought, like my daughter would be sitting on my lap. We're watching cartoons and I'm unplaiting her hair before bed. What a blessing. My life turned out nothing like I could have ever imagined.

Maggie Dent: [00:37:49] It's the little moments of connection sometimes, isn't it, that hit you right in the heart. If you if you have let go, if you're not too busy. You're worried about what I'm going to do next. Now [00:38:00] you're in that moment, 100% present. And unplaiting her hair gave you that joy.

Maggie Dent: [00:38:06] Now, Mitch, we all worry about our kids. I mean, I still worry about my boys, and, you know, they're ... two of mine are over 40. I know I don't look it, but they are. But what's your biggest what's your biggest fear for your girls? And especially as a First Nation girl in our world, what are your biggest fears?

Mitch Tambo: [00:38:26] My concerns for them. Like, you know, even the other week I had to say to them, if you if you's are going to travel and get on the train, I need you to promise me you won't be alone, because there's a big neo-Nazi thing here at the moment, and it's been all over the news. And I just need to know you are safe. And I need you to realise how serious this is. And I need you to make sure that if you go out, you're certainly not alone. Please. A lot of people don't realise because we lead great lives, you know, we're blessed. But when they go out in the real world, they will be treated differently. And that's just the harsh reality. And it's not trying to be negative, but it's about equipping them as a parent that they're empowered within that space. And they do feel like they're not behind the eight ball, but they're just aware that things are going to be different. But I can still get what's mine and lead the best life and be as successful as possible. And that's kind of our reality. And I want to make sure too, that when they're dating, they don't end up with someone that's going to lay a hand on them, or that kind of thing is really important to me.

Mitch Tambo: [00:39:28] Jobs come and go and you can change your career and all that kind of thing, but I don't want them to go through that trauma of being in that kind of relationship. And I don't want them to be subjected to neo-Nazism and all that kind of thing. But I can't say that it will never not happen, because that's just the reality of the world we live in, unfortunately, you know, and my nephew, he's a beautiful fellow. He's probably like six foot two, six foot three. He's a big fella and he's been targeted so many times. Police putting their hand on their gun. Why [00:40:00] is that a train station and where are you going? And pulling him up and being followed around. And he's, you know, had to dart into a Coles because he's just freaking out. Doesn't know what's going to go down. Like these things happen and they're real. And it's even happened to

my wife Lele where it's late at night, you know, ten minutes till Coles shuts. I've gone. I'll wait in the car. You just dart in and grab it and she just comes out just absolutely gutted because a security guard just followed her around the shop the whole time.

Mitch Tambo: [00:40:27] Just belittling her just to the point where I'm like, we're gonna have to ring like management of Coles because this is this is disgusting. I can't believe this has happened to you. And she's just profiled to the max because it's winter we're in the suburbs. Last minute run to Coles. So you just throw on what you've got on. And she chucks a hoodie on her head and runs into Coles. And they just followed her the whole time going you need to get out. We're closing. You need to get out. We're closing. You know, like how many times have we all ran into the supermarket. Not ten minutes on the clock like two minutes. It's like yeah, quick, go and get a loaf of bread and get back here. So things like that, they happen and it worries you as a parent because you don't want that to happen to your kids, but you can't stop it from happening. So all you can do is equip them the best you possibly can so that they are hopefully don't be as affected as like maybe you were once upon a time.

Maggie Dent: [00:41:14] Just makes me sad to to hear that still happens Mitch.

Mitch Tambo: [00:41:18] Yeah, I guess, like while we're on it. A big worry of mine is the social media, because it really upsets me when they get targeted over me. And that really upsets me because I just think, you know. It's obvious I'm on here. I've got a decent following. I made the decision. But you don't have to bring up my two year old daughter and then bring up, you know, my wife and make threats and say things that are just absolutely filthy. And I can see you're a real person with grandkids yourself. That kind of thing worries me, because a lot of the times when you see these kind of humans, it could be your local secretary at the doctor, it could be a school teacher, or it's everyday people [00:42:00] that you would never see it coming from. And you just think of your own baby's little hearts and they're so untouched in the world and that kind of thing. And as a parent, you just don't want their little hearts to be hurt on that level. You know.

Maggie Dent: [00:42:11] It's the dark underbelly, isn't it, of that world out there that it's just breaking hearts and, you know, and it it yeah, it is, it is um, and I guess there's a part of me because I'm an empath and I'm also a humanitarian, that I just thought

maybe we could move forward and realise that every child matters and that, you know, if we can come together with those gentle hearts and strong minds and we could do this a lot better than we do. But I think it's opened up an avenue for those who are unwell, immature, or I'm not sure. What would you call them?

Mitch Tambo: [00:42:47] Yeah. All of the above.

Maggie Dent: [00:42:48] All of the above. Okay, so let's lift the conversation.

Mitch Tambo: [00:42:53] Let's do it.

Maggie Dent: [00:42:54] Holding some hope. Yeah. So one of the favorite parts of our chats is, is all the wins. And I know you don't want to name a special one, but come on, give us one where you sort of thought, man, gee, I nailed that. I did that so good or I'm doing well. I mean, you've already nailed it with the plaits, but what's another one that. Come on, give us another one, please.

Mitch Tambo: [00:43:16] Oh, well, I feel like I nailed it. Look, I just love taking them out and doing stuff as a family. I know that it's, uh, you know, like the camping when we went away for a few nights and I didn't know what to expect. The girls had never camped before. It was like, oh, this could be really bad, you know what happens, all the do's and don'ts and and as soon as we got home and the day we got home, it would have had to have been, you know, high 30s to 40. And within half an hour, the girls are like, hey, can I bring such and such next time or can we do this next time? And I was like, yes, man, we did it, you know?

Maggie Dent: [00:43:46] Yeah, you did it.

Mitch Tambo: [00:43:47] We're like, we we pulled it off. You know, this is amazing because, uh, just to have them out, because, you know, kids these days. It's so different. You're not on push bikes. You're not waiting [00:44:00] for street lights to come on before you get home. You're not even really asking for sleepovers. You jump on a PlayStation or a console, you put a headset on and you can talk all night long. It's like, why would I stay at your house when I can be in my bed and we can hang out and play this game you'll love all night long? It's like, it's not in, we're not going to the bush.

We're not. We're not scratching our knees. We're not doing that. So to go camping, to get out paddle boards, kayaks, to be in the water every day, to be not in the shower as long as we'd like, or all these things to be sleeping a bit rough or whatever. And for everyone to have had a great time was just the best. And we got to a point because I brought my surfboards. And I just said to my wife, I'm ditching him because it's not about ... We just I'm just gonna make it happen for the kids. I'll just be 1,000% rocking every day to make sure they have a great time. And we went so hard and it all worked out. It was awesome.

Maggie Dent: [00:44:50] So was any music around the campfire?

Mitch Tambo: [00:44:53] Yeah. Well. It's so funny. Not really. We play out the speaker and, um, but we played cards every night. Played Uno. Yeah. There's another card game they all get into that just gets real competitive. Told stories. My mum was there, Lele's mum was there. Sorry. And, um, you know, we just yarned up and she told us all stories of what it was like growing up in West Papua back in the day, and it was just great. It's so good when you strip it back and camp because all you can do, I mean, you can have your phones, but I think you're just more likely to gravitate to hang out. Yep. Just talk about anything. Yeah. And, um, it's just such a great experience. And Phoenix, at that point she was just walking, so I had to cart all this gear I had, like, you know, like like.

Maggie Dent: [00:45:34] I know how much...

Mitch Tambo: [00:45:35] I had the biggest baby fence. I'm like tying it all around this gazebo to make it so she won't have to worry. And it was great.

Maggie Dent: [00:45:42] Uh, I'm going to ask you a maybe it's slightly tricky question, because I just want to know. Mitch. What is ..., you're only allowed one thing. What do you hope your girls will learn from you as their dad? As their father figure? Just one thing.

Mitch Tambo: [00:45:57] I was going to say ... unconditional love.

Maggie Dent: [00:46:00] Think [00:46:00] that's a pretty good one.

Mitch Tambo: [00:46:02] I think it's like, yeah, I'm going to say it maybe. I'm not going to say it's hard, but I feel like we live in a world that's very conditional. So if you can show up, like you have your bad days as the parents, you can be impatient or whatever. But I think unconditional love is just like, I'm never going to say, well, I dropped you here and did this and did that and blah blah, blah, and now you need to do this and x, Y, and Z, if, you know, I think it's just you can call me up. And I've always said it, I've said it to them. I said to Lele, look, only if you agree, because, um. If you don't, I respect that but I just want to say to the girls, openly, you're getting older and if anything ever goes down, where you say to us, you're going to stay at such and such as house, and all of a sudden you sneak out to a party, and such and such happens to just have so much to drink, and they're spewing all over themselves. And now you're saying you don't know what to do, that you always know you can just call my number and I won't ask any questions, and I'll come pick you up and we can deal with it tomorrow or the next day.

Mitch Tambo: [00:46:57] I want you to always know that I'm always here for you. No matter what happens, no matter how bad it gets, all I ask in return is you just tell me the truth. As long as you tell me the truth, I can deal with it. And we can just work through it. Because I don't ever want you to be trapped or stranded or in a position where you're like, they're going to kill me, because we're not going to kill you. Because my job isn't to be here and be an authoritarian. It's to just help guide you and do the best that I can. And a part of that is you need to know you're always safe and I'm always going to have your back. I just need you to tell the truth. Yeah. You know, and I feel like that's that's like an unconditional. Yeah. Like you can never disappoint me kind of thing.

Maggie Dent: [00:47:36] So the final question is if you could give some advice, a nugget of advice to your pre-dead self before you stepped into Lele's life with those beautiful girls. I'm pretty sure I know where it's going, but what would be that advice?

Mitch Tambo: [00:47:53] Dude, you're good enough, man. Yeah, bro, you've been through enough in life. You love this woman. [00:48:00] Do you love her? Yeah, I love her. Do you think she's the one? Yeah I do. What's holding you back? Is it just fear? You don't think you can do it? Yeah, I just don't think that. Man. Three girls like, are you serious? You reckon I can do it, man? I reckon if you love her and you're a smart man, and you know that they're an extension of her, and they're a part of her, and you're

willing. And you love her and you're ready for this. Then you're so ready for them. You just gotta not be so hard on yourself. And you just need to relax and breathe and enjoy it, man. You love being with kids. You love having fun. You love getting out there. What? This is like the perfect scenario for someone like you. What are you talking about? You just need to chill out. You're so uptight. Just relax. Something like that. I reckon you've got this. Yeah, you got this. Just chill. Relax. It's fine. Like it's all going to work out. And you know what? Me and Lele spoke when we first met. We used to just sit and talk for hours and hours and hours. We just talked and talked and we just have really open, honest conversations, whether you're uncomfortable or whatever. And everything we said that we would do if, if we got together and what would happen and all the rest of it, everything has happened.

Mitch Tambo: [00:49:08] No matter how out there, whatever, it's all fallen into place and it's all happened. And we often look back and go, wow, everything we said in that car that night and we'll talk and blah, blah, blah, it's here it is. Um, and it all just come back to me letting go. I think because Lele was just all good. She was so chilled. She just. It's like she could just see the real me a million miles away. And she just knew what I would grow into because everything. It's so weird because she wasn't an issue at all. Never a doubt. Never anything. It all comes back to, to me, just fall in fear and doubt and anxiety. And the minute I let go and just started to chill and have fun and just. Do me. And. No, it's all good. That's it. Things only could get better and better and better and better and better. And today I've got four incredible daughters. And I have four incredible relationships. And as much as it might be [00:50:00] like, that's great. Look at you. You're a dad. The thing is, is they have given me so much, I could never I could never pay them back if I tried, because they've helped me grow and develop in such a way that I could never repay him for that.

Maggie Dent: [00:50:13] It is one of the gifts you get from being a parent is you become a better human. Might not always be pretty, but I know that's definitely what happened to me. I'm a much better human as a consequence of being a mom. Yeah, yeah. Mitch, thank you so much for your time today.

Mitch Tambo: [00:50:31] Thank you for having me. Shout out to all the dads out there. Just relax. Let go, man. Stop being so hard on yourselves. All right? And thanks to all our beautiful wives and partners for just believing and seeing who we can truly be.

Shout out to all the kids to remember we love you in all our imperfections. Thanks for having me.

Maggie Dent: [00:50:50] I love it so much. Mitch Tambo proud Gamilaraay man and musician. Wow, what a deep chat. Mitch had some great ideas on how to be a good enough dad, so let's add them to our checklist.

Maggie Dent: [00:51:10] Firstly, that most dads are pretty afraid, especially of mucking up, and that all we need to do is open our hearts and love. That's the most important thing. Secondly, it's okay to show your kids that you're human, that we all have good and bad days, and then on the lousy days, make sure we repair them. And thirdly, it's hard to not take your kid's behaviour personally sometimes. But as he says, just surrender. Let go of your ego. Let go and let love. I'm Maggie Dent and this is the good enough dad. Follow us on the listener app or wherever you get your podcasts.