BECOMING TERRA ROAM

**SPEAKERS**

# Belle Owen (host), Carey Scheer (interviewer and narrator), Terra Roam (guest),

**Belle Owen 00:05**

How well do you know yourself? Are you stuck people pleasing and trying to fit in with the status quo? Or are you true to yourself, and creating a life as your authentic self?

I’m Belle Owen, the host of the Purple Orange Podcast. And these are questions that today's episode provokes. It is the final episode of 2024, season 2.

Today’s Guest Terra Roam is neurodivergent. Terra’s been on a long quest to become who they are. And this even took them on a solo walk around Australia.

**Terra Roam 00:38**

My psychologist said go for a walk every day. So I did! She probably cringes every time she hears that. (Laughs) that’s not what she meant!

**Belle Owen 00:50**

Conforming with societal ideals led Terra to low self-esteem and exposed them to a dangerous situation.

This episode comes with a trigger warning. It discusses domestic abuse and attempted suicide. If you don’t want to go there today, absolutely feel free to skip this episode. But know that the story you’ll hear ends with recovery, empowerment and authenticity.

If you’re struggling, please know lifeline is always there 13 11 14. Use them.

There is also 1 800 RESPECT – the national domestic family and sexual violence support hotline.

Now to today’s story, Becoming Terra Roam, produced by Carey Scheer.

**Carey Scheer 01:33**

Terra suggested we do the interview in the Adelaide Hills botanic gardens beneath the sprawling branches of a sturdy oak tree.

**Terra Roam 01:41**

I have quite a few tree Friends, some really special tree friends. This is one, and I haven't been back since I was 32 but I knew straight away my soul and this tree, the tree was guiding me to it.

**Carey Scheer 01:58**

Terra’s being seems tuned to the frequency of nature.

**Terra Roam 02:06**

When I was about four or five, I knew that I had this strange ability to hear and smell things that other people couldn't. I spent a lot of time in the bush. I was aware when things were going to change before other people were aware. And it was only because I was super sensitive to everything that was going on around me. Scents and footprints and just little different changes in the patterns. Like ants, I could follow them. So when they were carrying their eggs out in the open to another location that came before the rain.

**Carey Scheer 02:53**

In the bush, Terra’s heightened senses were a delight, but in the man-made world, it was a kind of torture.

**Terra Roam 03:03**

Traffic, vacuum cleaners, nutribullets, they physically hurt my head.

**Carey Scheer 03:12**

Picture water balloons.

**Terra Roam 03:15**

Not just one water balloon, a bucket of water balloons. It's just constantly being thrown at you all day, and you have to walk through that bombardment of water balloons all day. That's what it's like when you're experiencing sensory overload and you can't turn it off.

**Carey Scheer 03:37**

Terra struggled to fit in at school.

**Terra Roam 03:39**

I was being bullied. I already felt like I didn't belong here, and I wanted to escape, but I was only eight, I didn't know how to escape. That's when the depression and the trauma was beginning, and I had no idea that I had depression or trauma until decades later.

I realised that I'm a different person with my family, a different person with my friends, and a different person at school. I had to put on a mask and be who they wanted me to be, just to fit in and to get by. And as a child who learns to mask at a very young age, it stops you from discovering who you really are. What is the truth?

In nature, I wasn't judged. I could just be myself, unaware that that's what was happening. That was my safe place.

[Kookaburra sings]

**Carey Scheer 05:01**

You’re not really alone in nature, are you?

**Terra Roam 05:05**

You’re never alone in nature! [Laughs]

[Kookaburra loudly sings]

**Carey Scheer 05:15**

It would take Terra many years to understand who was under that mask. But while on that journey, that pull towards nature was a constant, and it took Terra on wild adventures as a firefighter, a search and maritime rescue worker, a snowshoe guide, a kayak instructor and even a sailor on the Kimberley coast.

**Terra Roam 05:39**

I had lots of sunshine, fresh air. I watched whales, dolphins, sharks, stingrays, crocodiles. I was working in that environment that exposed me to things that I was passionate about, the animals, the coral, the islands, the geology, but I was having increasing problems with the group social interactions, what was expected of me when I wasn't working. I would prefer to be lying in my bunk reading a book, so I would have to put that aside and then go upstairs, go into the lounge room, sit down with them to socialise. And it was never comfortable. I always felt awkward, you know when you sit down and you just can't put your legs or your arms in the right place? It was like that. It's like, I can't cross my legs properly, like I can't sit in this social environment properly.

And someone asked me, “How did you get this job?”

And I was like, “I applied for it.”

“You're really bad working in a team.”

Oh, okay, so they just came straight out with it. Then I realised I was a solo person.

**Carey Scheer 06:59**

Navigating the social world has been a continual challenge, but nature was always that solace, a constant comfort, that is, until somebody took it away.

**Terra Roam 07:16**

I had not reached a point in my life where I was comfortable in myself, with myself, so I still felt like I wasn't complete unless I was with someone. So I knew that I was autistic, so I also knew that it would be difficult for me to find a lovely person to have a relationship with. So I was also ready to just settle. So that's how I fell into it.

Every time I tried to go out for a bush walk, I was given the third degree. It was, “where did you go? When did you go? Who did you go with?” And they didn't believe me that I was just going for a bush walk on my own. So that they wouldn't get angry at me. Every time I went out on my own, I just stopped going out, where I just gave up and gave up and gave up my freedoms to keep them calm, and eventually I just wasn't going out into nature anymore, and I needed nature to be grounded and to stay sane.

I went to hospital three times having attempted suicide. I had no will to live, that had been destroyed.

**Carey Scheer 09:01**

Yet a tiny ember of hope still burned, and that was enough to get Terra to seek the help of a psychologist, not for the abusive relationship, Terra didn't call it that yet, but for the feelings of bleakness and despair. This psychologist gave Terra what would become a life changing assignment. She said, go home, get a big piece of paper and draw a line through the middle and on the bottom half, write the bad memories, those moments in your life that dragged you down. And on the top write all the good stuff, times you experienced, happiness, warmth, wonder.

**Terra Roam 09:42**

It was very bottom heavy. I couldn't remember much of the good stuff. I was remembering all of the bad stuff. And I called her and I said, “What's going on? I can't think of good stuff. It's so bottom heavy, I'm really struggling with this.”

She said, “Revisit it. Just keep on revisiting. Go back to it every day and sit there with the with the good memories.”

So every time I sat with it, I remembered more good things, and then more and more and more. And it snowballed. It was like Bush walking, family camps, kayaking, body surfing, Bush walking. Bush walking. Bush walking. Bush walking, bush walking. So much Bush walking.

And so we sat down with this timeline, and she said, “Okay, your next piece of homework is to go for a walk every day. It doesn't matter how far, you can go out for 10 minutes, just start with a short walk.”

And, so I did that, and when he started to get angry, I said, “Well, come with me. You'll see that I'm not going to someone's house.”

He had no trust. He thought that every single time I stepped out of the house, I was cheating on him. He had no grounds for it either. He was just scared that that's what I was doing. So, he started coming walking with me as well. And interesting, when he walked with me, he was healthier and happier, too.

**Carey Scheer 11:01**

One day, Terra walked to the library alone.

**Terra Roam 11:05**

It was domestic violence awareness day or week, and there was a table just inside the foyer of the library with pamphlets and everything, and there was one that had a checklist, and I picked that up, and I started looking at it, and I was like, oh, oh, ah, I'm in an abusive relationship. So I took that with me to the appointment with my psychologist. Then she said, “Hmm, okay, let's start working towards getting you out of this.”

**Carey Scheer 11:36**

With the psychologist’s help and careful planning. Tara escaped the abuser.

**Terra Roam 11:42**

And I was now in a point of my own path to recovery. I was beginning to feel some happiness in my life and well-being. And I thought, you know what? Let's do a really big walk. Let's take this message of recovery and suicide prevention around Australia and try and get to as many regional and remote places as possible.

**Carey Scheer 12:03**

Terra set out to planning what would become a whopping 17,200 kilometer, four-and-a-half-year solo, unassisted walk around Australia to raise awareness for suicide prevention.

**Terra Roam 12:19**

Being able to focus entirely on one thing helped me a lot. When I've got when I've my mind is set on one thing, I latch on to that and I go with it. I run with it until I can run no further.

**Carey Scheer 12:36**

The mission felt right, but the reaction from others? Fear.

**Terra Roam 12:42**

Aren't you scared of being on your own? Aren't you scared of camping in the dark? Aren't you scared of walking along the road? Aren't you scared of men? So many people were trying to load their fear onto me, and I hated it. It really made me angry when they did that, because this was my walk. I was doing it my way. I was going to have my own experiences, not their experiences, and I was prepared for uncomfortable situations. This is one of the things I learned masking. You learn body language and you learn communication. We'll just wait until those footsteps leave.

**Carey Scheer 13:27**

You heard it before I even did.

*[Terra and Carey laugh]*

**Carey Scheer 13:31**

When I'm recording these stories, I always have to have an ear tuned to the background noise waiting for that inevitable auditory interruption. My interviewees, they never seem to notice the dog barking, the lawn mower, or the plane droning overhead. But Terra, with those fine-tuned sensory abilities, caught the sound of distant footsteps. I couldn't even hear them, but they were headed our way.

**Terra Roam 13:38**

Oh, it's probably closing time, you know, in 10 minutes,

**Carey Scheer 14:03**

10 minutes, all right, well, we'll continue on then.

So, it turned out to be the staff at the Botanic Gardens coming to tell us they were closing up. So we gathered our things, and we moved the conversation indoors.

**Terra Roam 14:17**

Taking those first steps on a very big walk, and telling people, “Hi, I'm walking around Australia. I've walked to three kilometers of a very long walk around Australia.”

So that first day I had a lot of happiness, a lot of joy. I was taking the first steps in a very big, ambitious goal that I'd been planning for a couple of years. I had no idea how much trouble it was going to be or how much my feet were going to hurt at the end of the day, but yeah, that first day was great.

I didn't realise that there was so many lonely people out there who were struggling and would hear of my story and come out specifically to talk to me, people that would drive past and ask the general question, “what are you doing?” I would tell them what I'm doing. I'm out here walking around Australia for suicide prevention and raising funds for 24/7 crisis hotline. And that was their moment for someone to stand there and listen to their story and get things off their heart. And that's what I did most of the time. I didn't realise that when I started, otherwise I would have had the training for it, but I became the roadside counselor. We're all going through something, and doesn't matter whether you're a teenager having your first breakup or you've just lost your loved one from 30 years of marriage, whether you have a mental illness that you're unable to manage. It doesn't matter at what stage in life you are at. We're all experiencing hardship of some sort, and we have to be kind to each other and have a listening ear. And quite often that is the best way to help each other is just to listen.

**Terra Roam – Audio from the video journal of walk 16:37**

It's been about 14,300 k's. Solo, no support vehicle. I’m in Brisbane, I'll be in the city tomorrow. If you're around the city tomorrow, text me tonight. Phone me see if we can catch up for coffee or lunch.

**Terra Roam 17:03**

I was doing something so unusual, and it felt so natural. I was also still healing. I am every day, I'm on my recovery path. It's a life journey of management and care. So part of the self-love and self-awareness and accepting myself with all my quirks was processing a lot of things from the past. I was able to process these things as I walked and I was able to forgive myself and grow to understand that I'm just different and I don't need to bend to other people's will anymore.

When I was a kid, I wanted to be a boy, and I would pray at night that I would wake up a boy. I did not want to get my period. I didn't want to grow boobs, and I would go to sleep each night praying. I want to be a boy. I want to wake up a boy. I want to wake up a boy. I want to wake up a boy. So there was always that sense that I wasn't comfortable being female. It was so frustrating. I never felt myself. And then while walking around Australia, I thought to myself, I've never felt female, but you know what? I don't want to be male either. So who am I? I can just be someone in between. I can just be myself. I don't have to be male or female, I can just be Terra.

**Terra Roam – Audio from the video journal of walk 18:59**

Back on the track. So there's only 900 kilometers left of my walk around Australia when I reach Newcastle in a couple of months, hopefully I will have walked more than 16,000 kilometers. Around Australia, including around Tasmania and, yeah. Two months, 900 kilometers. Day one of hopefully, what will be the final section.

**Terra Roam 19:30**

When I walked around Australia, I was celebrated as the first woman to walk around Australia solo, self-assisted, and that was a big deal. I'm in a female body, and a lot of women were empowered by what I achieved. I show women what they are capable of doing. I show men what we are capable of doing. So I didn't push it and pressure anybody to identify me as non-binary, or they them, he, she, those things I'm really not fussed about. I've never really felt like I need to be identified as anything or anyone in particular. But as I've come to realise that there is not much representation for non-binary people in the adventure arena, I want to be more visible as non-binary so that they can see me, see what I've achieved, and dream bigger goals, and have the courage to go out there and achieve them. So, while I still inspire a lot of women in what I've achieved in a female body, I want to inspire a lot more people to be true to themselves and to see me for who I really am.

**Carey Scheer 21:07**

While there may be times where a mask temporarily goes on to survive a social situation, Terra now knows and embraces the person underneath.

**Terra Roam 21:19**

I'm an adventurer, an expedition leader, a writer, a traveler, wander luster, minimalist, seasonal worker, volunteer, autistic, ADHD, non-binary, public speaker and bisexual and a nudist. [laughs] There’s another surprise.

I'm a survivor, a survivalist, but not a prepper.

I'm a protester and I'm an environmentalist, I'm a snowshoer, I'm a guide, I'm a sister and a daughter and an auntie, but not a mother. I'm a student of life.

I'm Terra Roam.

Terra is the Latin word for Earth, and I am naturally a roamer of the earth. So I decided Terra Roam would become my name, and I changed it legally. I felt so comfortable with it. It is exactly who I am.

**Carey Scheer 22:43**

Terra Rome completed their four-and-a-half-year trek around Australia in Nobbys Beach, Newcastle, greeted by a cheering crowd of family, friends, reporters and strangers moved by their journey.

*(cheering audio from video journal of walk)*

**Terra Roam 23:04**

After a weekend of catching up with friends, family and doing a TV interview, I put the backpack on again and continued walking. When I do stay still for more than a few months, I start to get sick. I'm comfortable with being itinerant. It's okay. I'm a vagabond, so I just have to keep going.

**Belle Owen 23:33**

I’ve heard it said that the more authentic you are to yourself, the weirder your life will look to that outside world- and that’s a good thing. We don’t all need to desire and seek the same things. Terra has no desire to live a life in one spot, or in doors. They don’t rent, they don’t buy. They simply roam. And that is exactly what they want.

Did Terra’s story spark anything for you? Are there times you tried to fit in and conform, only to later realise it wasn't being true to yourself? We would love to hear about it. Please hit us up on our socials.

If you want to know more about Terra’s epic journey around Australia, they’ve written a book about it, called “Are ya right mate? A walk Around Australia.”

We’ll put links to Terra’s website, in the show notes.

We thank Terra Roam for sharing their story, which was produced by Carey Scheer. Music by blue dot sessions. I’m Belle Owen, and you’ve been listening to the Purple Orange Podcast. Find us at www.purpleorange.org.au

Have a great end of the year, and we’ll be back again later in 2025 for season 3.