
HE NEVER PLANNED TO DO IT ALONE. RAISING HIS DAUGHTER AS A SINGLE FATHER MADE HIM THE MAN HE ALWAYS WANTED TO BE.

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SPEAKERS

Naroop Jhooti, Amit Amin

Naroop 00:00

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Naroop 00:26

Imagine being a single father, never getting life's challenges while nurturing the future. The Dad Project tells these stories of strength, sacrifice, and unbreakable bonds. In Season 1, we dive into the voices of single fathers of color, capturing their victories and their struggles. It's time to recognise their impact, break down the stigma, and celebrate the powerful truth of fatherhood. Join me, your host Naroop Jhooti, on this inspiring journey.

Amit 01:08

So, super exciting day today. Day one of our Dad's Project. You're actually going to be interviewing the dads today, but who's going to interview you? It's me. I want to know your journey being a single father. I know it's something you never expected in a million

years, but you've embraced it, you take amazing pride in it. Tell me your story. Tell me your journey. What's it been like?

Naroop 01:30

It's been difficult. I think any single parent in general who says it's easy is probably not telling the truth. There are a lot of adjustments that you have to make being a single parent. There's a sense of guilt that this child may not live the full life as other children who have parents who are still together. That is in itself a challenge. I think every parent may deal with that in their own way, but most parents I know want to do the best for their kids. So you have this kind of battle between not wanting to spoil them, but then also treasuring the time that you have with them so much that you want to give everything. So I think that is something I've personally had to contend with: how do I raise my daughter with good values and morals, but yet I just want to give her everything because I've only got one child? That's difficult. But I think I've managed to strike a balance. I've also learned and adjusted to know that I am enough. I think there's always that fear: am I doing enough for my child? Am I enough for them? And I think I've come to the realisation that I am, which I think is really important.

Naroop (Host) 02:52

Let me ask you a question. Before your single fatherhood journey began, what do you think enabled and equipped you to deal with this? What had you worked on yourself before? Were there things that you'd learned and put in place that have allowed you to thrive?

Naroop 03:09

Yeah. I think we're all products of our own personal childhood. My parents did a great job in giving me and my brother everything that we could have wanted. We went to private school, we were never without the latest trainers, games consoles, or holidays. So I've got great role models. And when it came to raising Lara, my daughter, I knew I had a standard that I wanted to at least hit or even surpass. I've always had this thing that I want to send my daughter to private school, and it's not because there's anything wrong with state school.

There's not. But I was offered that luxury of going to private school and I feel I at least need to give her that. My upbringing was solid, it was strong. I had great role models. I knew what love was and commitment. So I've always raised Lara that way. Now, being single, I don't think anything should really change. I always took great responsibility for her. I never just said, 'Okay, your mother can do that.' I wanted to do it.

Naroop 04:19

I wanted to change her nappies. I take great pride in knowing that I changed her first nappy. I take great pride in knowing that I was the first one, apart from the nurse or the doctor, to hold her. And that's something that no one could really take away. So these things, I think, equip me to be the father that I am now.

Amit 04:40

What would you say you've learned most about yourself through this process, these last couple of years?

Naroop 04:50

That's a very good question. What I've learned most about myself is that I'm stronger than I think. Confidence and self-belief is the most important thing we can have, especially for me as a man. I need to know that I can do everything that my daughter needs.

Because raising a daughter and raising a son are two different things. I could relate to what a son needs. We can go and kick a football. But raising a daughter means I have to be a bit more sensitive. I have to understand her. She's constantly changing and I have to be able to keep up with that. I have to be okay with the fact that now she wants to hang out with her friends a bit more, she wants to FaceTimes with her friends, and when she gets close to the school gate she says, 'Dada, no, don't hold my hand.' I have to be okay with that. It's not her rejecting me.

It's just the understanding that she's becoming her own individual as well. Whereas I may have had her mother to speak to about that, there are others in my life I can talk to now too. But I have to comfort myself, which I think does give you strength. As a man raising her and knowing that I am her male role model in her life, I have no choice but to be confident and self-aware and the best version of myself. Which I think is really empowering, because I can't let myself slip. If I doubt myself, then I've lost it all.

Naroop 06:24

And I don't think it's about how much money you have, the house you have. It's: are you strong enough to believe in yourself that you can raise this child? That no matter what anyone says to you, you can do the best for your child. And that takes a lot of inner strength. So I think I've become more confident as a man. I've believed in myself more, and I think I love myself more too.

Amit 06:54

It's really interesting. You've obviously spent time reflecting about the past, dealing with the present, but also thinking about the future. Yesterday I was having lunch at your house and I was looking at your vision board. Tell me about your vision board.

Narooop 07:02

Yeah, my vision board. On my vision board, I've got raising Lara the best I can. I've got growing our businesses, scaling them up. I've got the offices that we want to get because we've moved out of our studio, so we want offices for our growing team. I've got how I want love in my life to look. Focusing more on myself, making sure I continue to take care of my body.

Health is number one, because without health, everything else goes. So these are the kind of visions I've got for the future. And in order for me to give to the ones I love, I have to first give to myself, and then from myself I can give to others.

Amit 07:50

It said 'Be more grateful' there, which I thought was beautiful. Because we can all beat ourselves up in life, we can all stress and we can all worry. But I bet you've started to really enjoy the simple things in life a lot more as well. And I know you're happiest when you're in the park with her on a sunny day.

Narooop 08:05

I'm definitely more grateful. I think everybody in life thinks that external things will make them happy. If I move to Dubai, I'll be happy. England always rains, I want to go and move to Dubai. But wherever you go, there you are. And I think that's a really powerful quote: you can't escape the realities of your mind.

Happiness is not a state of owning material things. It's a state of mind. It's a way of viewing the world and viewing yourself within it. Like, what do we really need to be happy? If we broke our leg and we were bed-bound, the thing that would make us the happiest is if we could walk.

But yet we all get up and walk every day and don't think anything of it. How often do we say, 'Thank you, Universe, for letting me walk'? Because it's one of our most fundamental things, and yet if that was taken away, how unhappy would we be? So I choose to look at the little things that mean a lot, and all the other stuff just comes and goes.

With Lara, I've chosen to be present and value my time with her. I'm probably more present and spend more time with her than most fathers in a marriage would, because I know I only have half the week, so it has to count. And seeing her face, seeing her smile, I remember the other day we went to a party and she had been dancing and taking her shoes off. It came back late at night and I washed her feet in the shower and she giggled and laughed.

And it's hearing that sound I was like: what more do you really need from life than that moment of pure happiness? That's what it's all about.

Amit 09:45

They say children inherit different types of personality traits from their parents. What bits of yourself do you see in Lara?

Naroop 09:52

I think Lara's very creative. She's very artistic. She's got an amazing voice, which I think she's probably got from her uncle. Very creative, very sensitive. She likes to watch and listen and observe.

She is strong. She's independent. She's come to terms with being a child in a family that's no longer a single unit, which I give her credit for. And it's funny, I think a lot of the time when people have children, they think it's the children that need the parents. But a lot of the time, it's the parents that need the children, because we learn so much from them. She's constantly reminding me of things, whether I look good or whether I've said something wrong.

She's no longer just a child. She's her own person. We can go and hang out together and have fun, do stuff. And it's beautiful to see that, even though she's not in a conventional husband-and-wife-and-child unit, she's still thriving.

Amit 10:55

I think for me this project is really about inspiring hope. There are going to be a lot of single parents watching this who are really curious about how people are thriving and surviving. One of the things I'm looking forward to most is getting those top tips from these single dads: how are they operating now, what's helped them in their life, and what's their advice to other parents who are maybe struggling?

If you had to sum up really simply, what would you say has fundamentally allowed you to

thrive, not give up on parenting, and really embrace it, push forward, not worry too much about the past, and be present and think about the future?

Naroop 11:43

I think there are a number of things. One is knowing that if you have separated and it's final from your partner, that that life no longer exists. That's gone. And coming to peace with that, allowing it to drift away, and saying, 'Okay, I'm at peace with you, with that life no longer being part of mine.' I think that's fundamental. Because if we try to hold on to something that no longer is, we can no longer move forward.

Amit 12:07

Let me ask you a question on that. Does the pain get less? Because if it's something that's fresh, that's just happened, someone's just parted from their partner, they're probably holding so much trauma and pain. Would you say a couple of years in, it's got slightly easier, and is there a process involved in that?

Naroop 12:23

I think that depends on the individual. As I was saying before, it comes down to how you view the situation. Coming to peace with it and understanding that there's nothing you can do to change what's happened. The universe wasn't conspiring against you. No one's punishing you. Stuff happens in life, good stuff and bad stuff. And I've always believed in balance in the universe. The way we live is all about balance.

So I truly believe that if something bad has happened, something good will happen of equal measure. I also believe that sometimes we tend to think of all the negatives: 'I'm a single parent, oh no, my life's going to be so bad.' But you can also think: 'I'm a single parent. I'm building a whole new life.'

Life could be amazing.' And I think that mindset of looking for opportunities to make your life more amazing, rather than looking for situations which will reaffirm that your life is no longer good, is your own choice. And that's what I chose to do. Life is amazing. Am I still alive?

Yes. Is my daughter healthy and happy? Yes. Then what more could you ask for? All we ever want as parents is for our child to be healthy and to be here with us. We have that. So the rest is now your choice as an adult, how you're going to handle it.

Narooop 14:06

And one thing I've read from Deepak Chopra which really helped me was: replace old memories with new memories. Move forward. Don't hold on to the old memories. Yes, they're going to be there. We're not robots that can wipe our hard drive. But come to peace with that. Create new memories. Do something fun. Reinvent yourself. Take up a new hobby.

Do something that you never thought you would ever do. Expose yourself to uncomfortable situations, which I think is really important. Don't hide behind a safety net of family and friends and try to protect yourself. Expose yourself to situations which you would be uncomfortable in, because in that you will find strength.

You'll probably walk away and think, 'Wow, I did that.' And you do that repeatedly, then you just think you're unstoppable. And tell yourself you're unstoppable. Tell everybody you feel amazing and you're confident and you look good, because a lot of it is what you're telling yourself. It doesn't matter if they think it or not. People's opinions of you don't really matter. It's what you tell yourself.

And I choose to look at myself in the mirror every morning and say I'm proud of myself. And that's a true thing. And if you can wake up and feel like that, then the rest of the day is going to be amazing.

Amit 15:12

You've just developed so much. I honestly couldn't be more proud. The bravery, kindness, talent you've got is just prospering. And I didn't know how you were going to cope, if I'm honest. I really didn't know.

But you've amazed me. And as your business partner and your cousin, your best friend, I'm privileged and I'm just so proud. So in a minute we're going to get into the shooting. You are officially Dad Number One. I'm going to be taking some portraits of you. How are you feeling about that?

Narooop 15:36

I think it's going to be interesting. I don't actually like being in front of the camera.

Amit 15:44

Your Instagram says otherwise.

Narooop 15:46

Despite what people think from my Instagram. But you know what, I want from this project: I want people to just look at these images and say, 'Look, Naroop's put himself out there.'

And someone said to me recently that my greatest work will be done from showing my vulnerability and my weaknesses. I think a lot of the time we try to hide behind the things that we're scared of, build walls, protect ourselves. But really, people appreciate vulnerability, because everyone's got stuff that they're hurting from, that they're scared of, that they don't want exposed.

But it's so liberating to say, 'This is me, man. You know, this is what you get. Check me out.' And then the other person will probably do the same. So I'm happy to do that and I want to do that. And I really hope that this project and what we're creating will, even if it affects just one dad in a positive way, be good work.