
FROM BUILDING AN EMPIRE TO FACING THE UNKNOWN. A FATHER AND SON EXPLORE RESILIENCE, MENTAL HEALTH, AND PURPOSE.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

fatherhood, resilience, entrepreneurship, mental health, breaking stigmas, family, vulnerability, purpose, southall, the dad project

SPEAKERS

Bindy Jhooti, Naroop Jhooti

Bindy 00:00

When we closed the factory down, I had to look at where I was going to go. During those periods when I was feeling vulnerable, who could I turn to? They would say, 'Well hold on, look what you've done.' I've had friends who said to me, 'You let your son pursue music? You're a fool. He should have been in medicine. Look at where you are right now.' From having everything, you become doubtful: are you going to come out the other side? I kept telling myself it's about getting over today. There's a reason for this. Obviously, I had a vision as well.

Naroop 00:40

Imagine carrying the weight of expectations, silent struggles, and the pressure to always have it together. The Dad Project is a space for open, honest conversations about men's mental health: raw, real, and overdue.

In Season 2, we go deeper, sharing powerful stories and fresh perspectives from those who've lived it and those who help others through it. Filmed at The Old Court in Windsor, this season is about breaking stigmas, redefining strength, and starting conversations that matter.

I'm your host, Naroop Jhooti. Let's talk.

So when I told my friends that in Season 2 I'm going to get my dad on a podcast, everyone's jaws dropped. The power of a son talking to a father about mental health, I think everybody knew what a riveting conversation that would be. Before we get into that, why don't you tell me, and obviously I know this story, but I would love for you to share it with the world: who is Bindy and where did he come from? What was your childhood like, and a bit about who you are?

Bindy 02:11

Well, we grew up in Delhi. Happy family. I mean, I can't remember any hardships when we were younger. Then, of course, when we came to the UK, again, my uncle had a business and Dad was working for him. So again, there was none of the usual challenges others may have had finding a job in a new country, etc.

But life has its own ways of throwing challenges at you. As Dad progressed, one of the things that I noticed was addiction. My uncle was sadly going through a few challenges, and that's the first time I noticed someone that I really respected, somebody I would have thought could overcome all this, struggling. He occasionally took me out and said, 'Bind, let's go out, I need a bottle of vodka.' But later on, he also told me, 'Bind, the cure to these worries is not drink, it's work.'

I guess I learned from that, and I developed my interest in wanting to be a businessman through Uncle as well. Going forward, when we were at school, everybody was talking about wanting to be a doctor, an engineer, or a pilot. Whatever it was, I was going around saying, 'I want to be a businessman.'

Naroop 04:06

And I think that was because of Uncle. Uncle, just for the listeners, is my mum's brother.

Bindy 04:13

Mum's brother. And he was really the first Indian businessman. He actually set up in Southall, the very first businessman, Southall being the hub of Indians in London. He was the first one to set up a business in Southall and really helped Southall become what it is today.

Naroop 04:29

Absolutely. So he had a profound effect on you, right?

Bindy 04:37

He did. I loved the guy. But to see him, I think he must have lost his life around 50, and to see all that he built up lost, we were too young to kind of carry that forward. Not that the family didn't try, I'm sure we did. But I just feel that there was no one there at that time to help Uncle through his worries. I still can't say what it was. He had a phenomenal business and had done very well, but there was something there.

Naroop 05:25

What's interesting about that is, if that was happening now, if someone is facing a challenge in their mind, it's a mental health challenge. They are suffering from something that they need coaching or help through, right? Sometimes people think of mental health as meaning you are severely depressed or disadvantaged in some way. But sometimes mental health is a challenge where you need to talk to somebody, you need to offload something.

Of course, we'll get into this later in the conversation, but he probably needed someone to talk to, someone to help guide him through and not try to escape what was happening through a bottle of vodka, which tends to happen and still does happen. So you had experiences from a very young age of seeing people that you respected facing challenges. How did that make you feel?

Bindy 06:31

I grew up with an attitude of wanting to develop myself. I didn't realize what that actually meant until much later, but I found myself depending more upon philosophical ways of handling situations.

Things happen to everybody. There's no one that is not going to go through challenges in life, but it's the way you handle them that ultimately determines whether you come out the other side or you succumb to it. I guess I've always looked for a way to see the other side, and the old saying, 'Look at your glass half full,' I've always seen my glass half full, not half empty.

Naroop 07:27

Do you think that stemmed from people around you, like Uncle, or is that something you found in yourself?

Bindy 07:35

As far as I can say, it was just something that I developed over a period of time. The only time that I can say something might have pushed me more towards that is when I joined Jenny's dad, your wife's mum's side, in business. Her father handed me a book, and that book was 'Think and Grow Rich', which you later asked me to read when I was in my 20s.

That led me on to overall success. To me, being rich doesn't mean just having money; it's being fulfilled in all aspects of your life. Through there, I learned about reading, so no doubt I developed my thought process through that.

Naroop 08:37

I love the story of when you were trying to work with your father-in-law. You went to the factory a number of times to be interviewed, and he was testing your desire and determination. I'd love for you to share that story.

Bindy 09:00

Dad, bless him, I loved the guy. He was more like a friend to me. When I first went to the factory, I found out from my sister that they had just started out with about 10 employees, and the factory was a clothing denim jeans factory. My sister found out that they needed somebody who could do a bit of accounts and some selling. I had just given in my notice where I was working in accounts, and I was going to start a venture with a friend of mine which didn't materialize, so it almost died before it began.

I remember my employer said, 'Why don't you take your notice back?' and I said, 'No, if I've taken the step, something will turn up.' There was me, in my 20s, looking for an opportunity, and that's when my sister said, 'Bind, why don't you try these guys? They need someone to do the books, you can do that, and if you want to sell, you'll have a business.'

I went to see Dad, and he said, 'Okay, I'll think about it.' He asked me to come back. I went two or three times, and then eventually he said, 'Yeah, I'll take you, and you can work for me.' I said, 'No, I'm not working for you, I want to be my own businessman.' He kind of smiled and said, 'Okay, you can take my samples.'

He gave me the samples, and within a couple of weeks he could see that I was having challenges. He said, 'Bindy, how are things going?' I said, 'Uncle, it's not as easy as I thought. It's not just a matter of taking samples, showing them to somebody, and getting

orders.' He said, 'I thought so. That's why I said you come and work for me. I tell you what: you work for me for a couple of days, and three days you sell independently.' That was the kind of deal we had. So I started working in the factory, learning the ins and outs of the rag trade, and it proved to be a successful business arrangement.

Naroop 11:09

Throughout all of my childhood, I remember coming to work at the factory. I was similar at school: when people thought about careers, I always used to say, 'I want to work with my dad, I'm going to grow the business.' Even though I was creative from a young age and had creative inclinations, I never really followed them because I wanted to join the business, which I eventually did.

Bindy 11:31

Yes, you did. And it's sad that pretty much after that we had to fold it up.

Naroop 11:39

What I remember is seeing you doing deliveries every day, driving from Southall in West London all the way to Commercial Street in East London every day, back and forth delivering. I'd go with you on those deliveries, and I'd see you go from shop to shop dropping the jeans off, highly respected by all of the clients. Everyone knew who you were. The factory grew to having a number of factories in India as well and hundreds of employees.

For me, that was really motivational, knowing what someone can achieve and build, and I think was the reason why I am so ambitious to this day. But when I started working with you, and I've shared this story on podcasts too, within that year the business folded. I had to witness what you and Mum had to go through. That was a challenging time. Even now, just thinking about it, so many emotions come up.

For me personally, I was thinking, 'Okay, I'm going to take this business on,' and now that deal was gone. I spent my teenage years thinking I was going to build this business, and that was gone. You and Mum having to go to markets and sell stock, that was difficult. But then the resilience of you having to find the strength, we're both going to cry.

Bindy 13:19

Well, when the business folded, if the truth be told, I could have raised some more money. But I saw people running and I started running with them, and you forget why you're running. When the business folded, I started to think back to what I really wanted

and where I had ended up.

Jenny's father used to say to me, 'Bindy, why do you keep building the business? Why do you want to expand? You've got your own business, why expand?' He said, 'Listen, I've got five daughters. Number one and two are married off, three more to go. I'm going to retire at 60 and travel the world.' By that time he'd made us partners in the business. I said, 'No, I just want to grow the business.'

When I reflected back to my childhood, when I was young I used to say, 'I'm going to have a business, but I'm not going to have employees; I'm going to have business partners.' I forgot that part about not having employees! We had about 10 when I joined Dad; we had about 500 when we decided to close it down. I remember sitting in my office looking at Guru Nanak, and I said, 'Babaji, this was not the deal! I wanted a business, you gave me a business, but I didn't want employees and you've given me 500. I can't handle it.'

That is when I decided to get rid of everything. That's when you helped us clear the stock. It was a couple of years of turmoil, but that enabled Jenny to pursue her passion, because she had always wanted to be in the beauty business. We set it up, and thank God, look where she is today. That left me free to search for my purpose.

Narooop 15:34

Before we go on to you searching for your purpose: when you close a business, you must go through a lot of emotions. I can really remember that whole time. You were obviously feeling a lot of stuff, but as a man, there's this idea that we've got to be strong, solid, and emotionally stable.

You didn't have any therapy. I don't remember you talking to anybody about it. You probably had conversations with Mum, but even then, as men, we want to show our partner, 'I'm good, don't worry about it, I've got everything under control.' A lot of the time we haven't; it's just stuff going around in our head and we're trying to make sense of it.

You never turned to any abusive substances. I never remember a time of you just lying in bed and wallowing in self-pity, but you were feeling something. Tell me about what you were feeling, and how did you cope with it? Because I didn't see the traditional ways of dealing with challenges, and that must have affected your mental health: 500 employees in a business, and now you were in your mid-40s, a few years older than I am now, and everything that you knew was gone. You were searching for a new career, thinking about

reputation and what people would think of you. What were your thoughts, and how did you overcome that time?

Bindy 17:12

The funny thing is, if you remember when we closed the factory down, it was about that time that Nick came up to us, Nick being my other son, your brother, and said, 'I want to pursue my passion in music.'

On the one hand, I was thinking at least I've got one son going into a safe career in medicine. But then he says, 'I don't want to write prescriptions, I want to write music.' Thank God his passion for music has worked out for him, but remember at that time I had to make that decision to let him pursue his passion, while I had to look at where I was going to go.

Luckily, we gradually found a way. But during those periods when I was feeling vulnerable, who could I turn to? They would say, 'Well hold on, look what you've done.' I've had friends who said to me, 'You let your son pursue music? You're a fool. He should have been in medicine. Look at where you are right now.' From having everything, you become doubtful: are you going to come out the other side?

Who could I turn to? Nobody, because you're thinking, who is going to listen to me when I haven't done the obvious thing they would have done? They wouldn't have let their son go into music when they've just wrapped up their business and are still looking for a career.

I think resilience, having a philosophical outlook on life, helped. I kept telling myself it's about getting over today. There is a reason for this, and obviously I had a vision as well. I was quietly trying to see where my passion would take me. If I didn't have that 'light someone's candle' project at the very back of my mind, because I had that dream once...

Naroop 19:45

Tell me about the 'light someone's candle' dream.

Bindy 19:53

I had a dream outside of a big stadium. There's thousands of us waiting in line to go in, and we're going to listen to this speaker talk about personal development, business, and all that kind of stuff. As we're walking in, we're all being handed a candle. We all go in, holding a candle, and then all of a sudden all the lights in the stadium go out. It's pitch

darkness.

We've got the means, a candle to light up the place, but it's dark. Then we see one person walking into the auditorium with a lit candle, and he goes and lights the next person's candle, and tells him to light his neighbor's candle, and the whole stadium lights up. Then the dream ended.

I said, 'What was that about?' In my mind, I just kept thinking: light someone's candle, light someone's candle. It wasn't until later that I applied it to what I wanted to do, which was: in business, I'm there to empower somebody else. I love what you are doing now because you're empowering and changing people's lives who have mental stress, and I love what Nick is doing.

Naroop 21:37

That's a beautiful dream, and there's so many ways to interpret it. I've always believed from a young age that you wanted to help people. It's never been about money, greed, or showing off; it's about helping.

Looking back at it now, I can see that it's probably worked out for your best interest based on the man you are now. But it was a lot of stress. I remember sitting in the office on the desk opposite you, and I could hear one of your main buyers shouting at you because some of the orders from India were coming in wrong or delayed.

As a son hearing his father being spoken to aggressively by someone else, and I'm 21 fresh out of uni not knowing what to do, my options were limited in terms of how I could help you. We had fax machines then; there was no Google. I was thinking, 'What do I do to help this business? How can I help Mum and Dad?' I felt my hands were tied, and I just had to follow your lead.

As a dad with two sons, one embarking on a career that is highly risky, and the second not really knowing what to do because his dream of joining you has evaporated, guiding your sons at that time when you were facing your most difficult challenge, how did you prepare yourself for that? Did you feel that pressure?

Bindy 23:36

I knew at that time that simply I could not afford to fail. There was too much at stake. Having brought you guys up, there was a whole life still to go. I did whatever I could

because I believe, and I'll admit this is not something that most fathers would tell their kids, to follow your dream. But that's the way I am. I wanted you guys to be able to do what you wanted.

We had to look at the family needs. Because we had had a good business, we weren't doing poorly; we were okay. It was about affording that going forward. We didn't need a lot of money; we needed enough to get by. Time is the other healer. When someone goes through hardship, the pain seems great at the moment. With the passage of time, nothing else may have changed, but somehow it becomes manageable. Pain has got to become manageable for you to be able to take the actions needed.

In the short term, it would have been easier to take to drinking because you get away from reality, but in the long run that's not going to help. Jenny told me that one of our customers was asking her, 'Is Bindy okay?' and she said, 'Yeah, he's trying to find a way out, he hasn't taken to drinking or abusive behavior.'

Those are the expectations of some people: that if you go through challenges, that's what you're going to end up doing, unless you control yourself and get the right guidance.

Naroop 25:55

If someone had said to you, 'Bindy, I know you're going through a stressful time, there's a men's meetup group where you can speak to a group of men and share your feelings, and on top of that you can have one-on-one therapy sessions,' would you have gone to that?

Bindy 26:21

Of course. If you can offload to the right people, it helps. Sometimes people offload to the wrong people, which only frustrates your situation. It's very important that you share your feelings and emotions with the right people.

Naroop 26:49

Do you think some of those emotions still sit with you? Do you feel like you've fully moved past that stage of your life and come to peace with it?

Bindy 27:28

No, because I am not where I want to be. Outside it's fine, but inside it's my fulfillment. If you were to say, 'Bindy, are you fulfilled?' I'm telling you now, I'm not, because I'm still

searching. I balance life around the family and keep quiet, but right now you're asking me, and I'm telling you I'm not completely fulfilled.

Naroop 28:13

What is that fulfillment that you're searching for?

Bindy 28:20

As men, we have this feeling of wanting to achieve something and be successful. Others may look at you right now and say you're fairly successful: you've got a couple of boys doing very well, you've got a nice beauty business and all that. But I look at that and think, 'That's great, but what about my feelings? What did I achieve?' I still have this desire to do something significant in my life, and that's what keeps me going.

Naroop 29:09

Divorce is quite common now, but we never really hear how the parents of people who are getting divorced feel. In your generation, divorce wasn't as common. What would you share with people out there about the kind of emotions parents feel when their children's marriage comes to an end, and how families can navigate that?

Bindy 30:31

When something like this happens, it doesn't just affect the person going through the divorce; of course it affects the whole family and siblings. How you overcome that is through trust and keeping the channels of communication open.

Sometimes it may be only a little thing you're talking about, but those little things build up to improve the situation until you feel you can handle the real issues. We're not always able to do that easily because parents might come from one angle and children from another. But ultimately, the goal is the same: to bring peace and comfort to the person.

Naroop 32:10

Growing up in Southall in your 20s and 30s, there must have been so many men who suffered from mental health issues and ended up down at the pub. What was the environment like back then for men who weren't coping well?

Bindy 33:21

In those early days, we weren't aware of any support systems apart from friends or family, and friends and family aren't always able to listen well and guide you. I would often hear people simply say, 'Oh, he's lost it, he's gone off his rocker, he's hit the bottle. I wish he wouldn't drink so much or fight so much.' But they didn't look at why they were going through what they were.

I saw a video recently that said, 'If a flower isn't growing right, don't blame the flower; look at the soil.' A lot of the time, the environment that these men were in was the wrong environment. How could they flourish when their environment was so difficult?

Naroop 34:43

How would you encourage men to get out of that negative environment?

Bindy 35:24

First, that individual has got to have the feeling that enough is enough, and that they want to change. Anyone that's not ready for change, you can't help them; you can give them all the advice, but they're not going to shift. But once someone is ready for change, they need confidence and trust in the individual or organization that is going to help them.

Naroop 36:30

When you first heard about what I was trying to build with The Dad Project, bearing in mind it was a shift from working in photography and film, what were your initial thoughts?

Bindy 37:03

I loved the idea because you're working towards something that's going to empower and help others, which is something close to my heart. When you see the pain around you, you realize how much needs to be done. A lot of people don't open up or seek help. I would be very proud to see you move forward with this project and be a beacon of light to lots of people.

Naroop 38:15

What advice would you give to men nowadays who are going through mental health challenges?

Bindy 38:38

The first thing is that a lot of men bottle things up and don't seek help. Those that do open up sometimes only open up to a friend who might not have the ability to guide them. There needs to be more organizations that can help people.

Naroop 39:31

When you were going through the closing of your business, you kept moving. You progressed towards something, working towards that light at the end of the tunnel. Other men can learn from that: you don't have to achieve the ultimate goal immediately, but take steps every day so life is moving towards a better place.

Bindy 40:45

If you're at stage A and you want to get to stage B, if you believe you are taking the right steps, you carry on, even though life is up and down. When people don't have that belief, they give up. Keep taking those steps and you will get there.

Naroop 41:53

The Dad Project is about positive role models. In my life, and for my brother, we're blessed that you were our role model and first mentor. When you think back at your life, how would you want Bindy Jhooti to be remembered?

Bindy 43:28

I'd like to think that I made an impact on someone's life. If somebody could say, 'Bindy helped me overcome the challenges I had,' that's all I want. People build empires, but to know you helped someone move forward in their life, what more could you ask for?

Naroop 44:25

When I started directing music videos, you wrote to me on my 30th birthday: 'Live your dream and fulfill mine.' I got that tattooed on my arm with an eagle for strength. You've had all the impact you could ever want.

For men to see a father and son have an open-hearted conversation is so important. In living rooms across the world, fathers and sons sit together and never talk about emotions. Sons need to hear their fathers are proud of them, and fathers need to hear their sons love them too.

Bindy 46:57

My dad used to say in Punjabi, 'We are all going to die sometime, let's learn how to live.' Meaning: let's sit down, have a drink, have a chat. Whether you're having a coffee, tea, or water, chatting is so important. We need this. Just opening up doesn't mean you have to have massive issues; it's about connecting.

Narooop 48:09

Amazing. Thank you, Dad. It's been great having you.

Bindy 48:09

Thank you.