**Between our pages**

Episode 5 with Dr Tony Buti MLA

[0:00] Music.  
  
[0:10] Fiona: Welcome. You're listening to Between Our Pages, a Premier's Reading Challenge WA podcast.

This episode was recorded on Whadjuk Noongar land. We acknowledge the traditional custodians and pay respects to their elders past, present and emerging.

My name is Fiona Bartholomaeus and together we'll be diving into the wonderful world of books and reading right here in WA.  
  
Today we're chatting with the Honourable Dr Tony Buti, MLA, Minister for Education, Aboriginal Affairs, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests.

Let's go!  
  
[0:38] Music.  
  
[0:47] Fiona: Alkira is a heartfelt personal story about resilience, determination and family.  
  
It documents the struggles and triumphs of Alkira Buti living with Cri Du Chat syndrome.

It's the most recent title from the Honourable Dr Tony Buti MLA, Minister for Education and Aboriginal Affairs, Citizenship and Multicultural Interests.

A former teacher, lecturer, lawyer and AFL agent, Minister Buti has written books on a range of subjects but none as personal as our Alkira.

Minister Buti, thank you so much for joining me.

Minister Buti: Thank you for inviting me.  
  
Fiona: So you have an incredible list of qualifications. Where does published author sit among your achievements?

Minister Buti: Oh look, it's hard to compare various achievements but I have to say, publishing a book is a, just has an incredible emotional reaffirmation of all the hard work that you put into it and yeah, it's just, it's fantastic.

Fiona: So what made you want to write books?

Minister Buti: Yeah look interesting question. I have a very active mind and I often just want to write down what I'm thinking, and also motivated to try and express my views to a wider audience.

Fiona: Yeah, and often just putting your thoughts on a page must help to get it out there.

Minister Buti: It does, and you mentioned the book Alkira. That was one where it was, I had to get it out there. Not just for my personal reflections, but something I wanted to tell the world.

Fiona: And tell us about your most recent book, Alkira. How did it come about?

Minister Buti: Yeah look at one of the main motivations about, there's two main motivations for writing the book.  
  
[2:23] Alkira, which is the name of my daughter, our 29 year old daughter. One was I was constantly asked what is her disability or her unique characteristics and that was always very difficult to, to explain because she's very unique. So I thought well look I'm just going to try and write a book about it, so try and help explain what makes Alkira, Alkira and the second I wanted to try and develop or start a public discourse on our attitudes to people with disabilities.

Fiona: And it is a very personal story for yourself and your family. What made you decide to share that really personal thing with the public?

Minister Buti: Well you hit the nail on the head there, it is a very personal account and there were some unease about their privacy or trying to preserve or protect or respect Alkira's privacy.

I just felt, you know, I talked to Alkira, I talked to my wife and Akira's brothers, they were okay about it. Alkira took a bit longer, but she's incredibly proud of the book now, she considers herself a co-author. In the end though I thought if I wrote it in a certain way that I could still respect her confidentiality and privacy and I hope, that I achieved that.

Fiona: So why should people pick up your book and read it?  
  
[3:47] Minister Buti: Oh look that's, I'm too humble to advertise my book but look I think they should because you know one of the motivations was I wanted people to get an understanding what it's like to have a person with unique needs or special needs in your family and some of the trials or tribulations that they have to endure and a lot of it's based around people's attitudes. The issue is not not necessarily the person that has the so-called disability, it's how people respond to that.

Fiona: How different was it for you writing about a personal experience in comparison to some of the other topics you've written over the years?  
  
Minister Buti: Yeah, easier and more difficult. Easier in the sense that I knew a lot of it because I've observed it, but of course more difficult in the sense that I was dealing with someone that I personally know and love. So yeah, much more difficult on an emotional level, but in many respects easier from a research point of view.  
  
[4:45] Fiona: How important is it for students and children to be able to read personal non-fiction stories as well as fiction of all genres?

Minister Buti: Well I think very important and I think one of the deficiencies in the Australian literary landscape I think, compared to the US, is that we don't do non-fiction as well.  
  
I mean we have some great non-fiction writers and but I think our fiction writers are on par with anywhere in the world, but we don't do non-fiction as well, probably because generally we don't like talking about ourselves. But the other thing, besides memoirs and biographies, which we do okay, is the, I don't think we bring to life to a wider audience non-fiction material like legal cases or political events and so forth.

Fiona: And it's such a great way of understanding the society and people that you live in and around as well. So how big of a role did reading play in your childhood?  
  
[5:43] Minister Buti: Well, not as much as it should have. I came from a household where there wasn't many books in the house. There were some old cartoon encyclopedias, which I still have, which were quite informative, but there was newspapers and magazines and I would read them from front to back, cover and back again. Actually, I always started on the back page when I was a sports nut.

But there wasn't enough books.

So really, I've had to learn myself the art of reading, besides obviously what I learned at school, and the enjoyment of reading because I didn't, I wasn't fostered with that at home.  
  
Fiona: Have you found over the years you've become a bit more of an avid reader when you have time to?

Minister Buti: I love books, love reading. Any opportunity, I will read.  
  
Fiona: And you've written quite a few books already, do you have plans to release many more?

Minister Buti: I do. I actually finished a manuscript about 18 months ago on the voluntary assisted dying debate that we had in this place [Parliament of Western Australia] a couple of years ago, so I'm looking at trying to find a publisher for that, and then I have a couple of other projects I would like to do.

Having said that, now that I'm a minister, the time for writing is severely limited.

Fiona: I can imagine you've got too many busy things on your plate.  
  
Minister Buti: I have, but this may surprise some people, but actually writing can be relaxing as well.  
  
[7:09] Fiona: So the Premier's Reading Challenge is back for 2023. How much has reading helped you in your state government role, but also in your everyday life?

Minister Buti: Reading is, I think, so instrumental to not only knowledge, but I think into self-reflection and I think allowing you to think in a much more mature and reflective manner, which I think is incredibly important for a policymaker.  
  
Fiona: Now, before we let you go, I'm going to ask you some rapid fire questions and I just want the first answer that pops into your head.

What is your favourite book?  
  
Minister Buti: Of Mice and Men.

Fiona: What are you reading at the moment?

Minister Buti: A book called From the Ground Up, which is very appropriate for an education minister. It's about a school in Melbourne that was closed and then reopened and was voted the best school in Australia in 2021.

Fiona: Non-fiction or fiction?

Minister Buti: Oh look, I love both but I'd probably read more non-fiction than fiction.  
  
Fiona: Favourite genre?  
  
Minister Buti: Legal, legal non-fiction.

Fiona: And in the spirit of the Premier's Reading Challenge, how many books do you hope to read in 2023?

Minister Buti: Well, I set a challenge two years ago to read 52, and I did, but last year I only read 26.

So if I can read 28 this year, I think I've done well.  
  
[8:19] Music.  
  
[8:30] Fiona: You've been listening to Between Our Pages, a Premier's Reading Challenge WA podcast.  
  
Thanks to our guest, Minister Tony Buti, for joining me on this episode.

If you wanna keep up to date about future podcast episodes, you can follow the Premier's Reading Challenge Facebook and Instagram pages at Premier's Reading Challenge WA.

Thank you for listening. Happy reading. See you next time!  
  
[8:48] Music.