

That's the clock tower in the historic city hall building in Downtown Brisbane, Australia! This is Stacy Julian, with episode 9, of Exactly Enough Time. You might think from its title, that this is a podcast about productivity. And while I love to rock a day and get stuff done, exactly enough time is much more about being present. It's about recognizing the time you have and making the most of it. It's about owning what you love (I love travel!) and inviting more of whatever that is into your life. In this podcast I tell stories and I invite you to celebrate people, places and things- like phenomenal, creative communities-that make you and your life a-mazing!

Okay, so I have just returned from the annual Australasia convention for Close to my Heart, where I have learned a new expression that describes brilliantly what I experienced there. Here is my friend Allison, "my name is Alison and I'm from Adelaide and it goes "off off off" that means it's party town." It goes off off off. Of course my accent just does not do that phrase justice, but let me tell you that is one way to describe a Close to my Heart convention. It goes off-off-off, it is a two-day party. I was traveling with members of the CTMH team in order to prevent the fourth and final (for now) product in the Story by Stacy line. Something I'll be sharing much more about in upcoming episodes. And I was able to travel with my youngest son, Taft. It was the senior trip of sorts. And together experience, in addition to this convention, Brisbane. Which is an incredible city! It lines the banks of the winding Brisbane River and lights up at night like nothing I've ever seen. Travel truly is a gift. To be able to, even for a short time, immerse yourself in the culture of a new place. And in this case, a very warm and humid place. There were moments I thought, I'm going to melt-right here, on the spot. But I left at home the snow and I welcomed the heat. Honestly, we loved it. There is a relaxed sort-of bustle in Brisbane and by that, I mean lots of people. More than two million people live in Brisbane. People who hurry about, but in a very friendly way. Who easily just like their signs say "give way" to newcomers and embraced them. My experience of Australia and New Zealand, I have traveled to Australia three times and been to New Zealand once. Has always been of warm and inviting and very gracious people who make time for morning and afternoon tea. And who delight in sharing their customs. While there, I knew I wanted to record an episode of my podcast and I was very privileged to sit down with Monica, Jill and Kim, near the end of convention day 1 and chat about Close to my Heart. So that you can learn more about this remarkable company and its culture of community and connection. So, let's jump right in.

SJ- So, let's go around the circle and just please introduce yourself. That way the listeners can recognize your voice and get to know you a little bit.

MW- I'm Monica Wihongi and I work at Close to my Heart and I've been there 26 years. I'm also a mother of seven children, ages 24 to 7. And I've been married to Jodi for 25 years. I am the president of Close to my Heart. I've been the president for a year. I've been working my way through Close to my Heart for the last 26 years.

JB- I'm Jill Broadbent. I also work at Close to my Heart. I'm the Creative Communications manager and this month actually is my 15th year. It's fun to hit that milestone and such an amazing company to be a part of. It's been a great journey and I have three children. A girl that's 13, a girl that's 10 and a 7 year old boy. And a husband named Dave who is amazing and supportive and we've been married almost 17 years.

SJ- So in addition to these lovely Close to my Heart ladies, we have Kim with us. Kim, introduce yourself. Tell my listeners who you are.

KT- Ok, my name is Kim Tomholt and I am a consultant with this wonderful company, Close to my Heart. I am married to my soulmate, my best friend Keith and we could be married for 3 years, coming up to 4 years. I have a 27 year old daughter who just recently got married, last week. So I have something in common with Monica, her daughter got married as well. Monica's second and my first. Then I have an 18 year old son named Troy.

SJ- I have a few questions planned but I want this to feel comfortable and so if you want to jump in, please do. I just really thought for those people who aren't super familiar with Close to my Heart that are listening, that it would be just good to get to know you since we're all here together in Brisbane, Australia. So, Jill, I'm going to start with you. Where are we exactly and why?

JB- We are in Brisbane, Australia at the Close to my Heart Australasian convention, which means all of the Australia and New Zealand consultants in this area are invited to this convention to come and celebrate and to be a part of this fun weekend together.

SJ- This particular convention happens once once a year. What is the actual purpose of a convention?

JB- So convention is a great opportunity to recognize consultants. They do so much all throughout the year and different things that they do with their teams and to promote one another and to build their business and so we do lots of recognition, a beautiful award ceremony and lots to recognize our consultants in all of their capacities. We also do a lot of training, so we look at that as education and an opportunity to really share more about how they can grow personally, professionally and all of that. And we also look at it as an opportunity to actually celebrate. Which is actually the theme this year. It has always been a goal to have celebration be a huge part of the convention. We want it to be fun, we want it to be exciting, we unveil new products. But this year especially the theme is "celebrate" because it was the 35th year that our founder and CEO Jeanette Winton has been in business. So this entire year we are celebrating her 35th year in business, which is an amazing thing in the scrapbooking world.

SJ- Monica, I want to go to you next. Just tell us a little bit, a quick history of Close to my Heart.

MW- A quick history. You've done a great job talking about the Dots days and in past episodes of your podcast, but Jeanette Lynton started this as a direct selling business 35 years ago and did rubber stamps. She was actually the designer. She was the sole designer for many many years, then got into scrapbooking, designed paper and meanwhile the company's just growing by the thousands. We have thousands of independent sales consultants all over the United States, Canada, Australia and New Zealand and parts unknown very soon. We are excited, we are expanding. We are expanding to other places. Janette's dream has always been to be all over the world. And she loves to say, as long as little girls are born with hands, we can have papercrating, scrapbooking, cardmaking. So we have all these consultants all over and we help them to honor their relationships through paper crafting and scrapbooking. But I think the thing that has given us the longevity that we have is really the community. Our consultant community is this is a sisterhood-it's amazing. And we do allow men, you know.

SJ- And we do have them from time to time. I remember speaking at convention and we have a couple of them in the audience.

MW- It's a beautiful organization and I think that's why I've stuck with it so long too, even though I have a big family and a lot of family commitments. It's the mission and the purpose of empowering women to make the world a better place and that's what Close to my Heart does.

SJ- That's fantastic. Okay Kim, special guest-now it's your turn. So you're here at this convention in Brisbane. So is Brisbane your home? Or how did you find Close to my Heart and become a consultant?

KT- I actually live in Victoria. So we are in Queensland, so down south. I'm about two hours east of Meblourne, the main city. In a fairly quiet, country little town. It's called Traralgon. We have several consultants in Traralgon. How we came into the big beautiful family of Close to my Heart was Janette opened her door to Australia and New Zealand and we have thousands of consultants looking for a new home. We all jumped on board. We absolutely love it. It's just opened our eyes to the big wide wonderful world of papercrafting.

SJ- And just to clarify, you were formerly with a company that closed their doors in this part of the world at least, that was purely scrapbooking.

KT- We now have our eyes, just wide! It's a hard feeling to describe, but we love it.

JB- We helped them to embrace stamping with our clear acrylic stamps. It was so fun. I came to the country six years ago to help them open up and I went from city to city. I went to 10 cities in like 10 days, it was crazy. And to see all these women who were crafters through their scrapbooking, but then to take those clear blocks with those beautiful images and stamp it for the first time, it was magic. It's amazing, the way that they've embraced it. Now they're all paper crafters. Not just memory keepers, but paper crafters. It's been beautiful. In fact, we're going to do a creativity showcase where they are all going to showcase their art.

SJ- Which is phenomenal. It always blows my mind. Actually, Kim walked in earlier and handed me this...I don't know how to describe it, I'll have to take a picture and put it in the show notes. What would you call it? A gold vase. In America we would say "vase."

KT- It's basically a piece of beautiful Close to my Heart paper...folded. It's basically origami.

SJ- It is. I was able to put a little flower and of course there's chocolate inside. So, we talked about this already but I shared in a previous episode my beginnings at DOTS, which became Close to my Heart. For me, at the time, it was all about affording stamps, getting my hands on more of that fun stuff that I had been introduced to and I had this addiction that I had to feed. What I didn't expect and what I want to talk about for a little bit, was a.) how easy it was for me to share what I was learning, I didn't expect that. And more importantly how quickly I discovered the community of like-minded, for lack of a better term, "soul sisters." I instantly felt connected. I didn't know at the time how much I would need that sisterhood in the next several years of my life. My husband was very busy, I had little kids and it literally saved me, my sanity, for a number of years. So Kim, back to you, I want to hear from you again. Of course you're part of this worldwide CTMH community, but tell me about your own team and how you share and teach this passion and what you've learned about that.

KT- Sure, so my team basically consists of a lot of my customers I have had from the beginning. We're not a very big team. My friends have actually realized that they can join Close to my Heart, get a great discount and be a part of the bigger, wider community that is Close to my Heart. You said "sisterhood" before and that is exactly what it is like. So we get together, hopefully, monthly and we just basically have a good time. We share our photos, share our creativity and one of the things I love about this community is that the girls that I have, they are

like my sisters. My family is spread out all around Australia and I don't have a lot of close family, so they are my family.

SJ- I totally understand that. So when I, back in the day, had two little boys and lived in this little tiny house. Probably about the size of this hotel room that we're recording in today. But every Friday I had my customers over I would put up those folding tables. I'd push my furniture up against the wall and set up my three folding tables and my cute girls would come to my door and knock and we would sit around, my boys would be downstairs with the VCR movie in and they'd come up. That was my world, really, my way of connecting outside of being a mom, which I love but everybody needs a break. I just had no idea that I would come to trust it so much and need it. So, Monica or Jill, I just want my listeners to know a little bit more about how this company works. What does Close to my Heart do to create and support these teams, these groups of women?

MW- I would say it's an amazing place to share creativity. We as the home office, are always looking for ways to support and give feedback and opportunity and ideas to our field. I oversee our advertising and public relations and so a lot of things that we're always trying to do for brand recognition its end benefit of our consultants so that they have the opportunity for more people to say, "oh, Close to my Heart, I've heard of you." or "I've seen your art and I love what you guys do." And it opens that door for consultants to bridge that and become the face and the person behind the brand and so we're always looking for ways to to help in that way. But the creativity is really such a key part, because again-as the home office, we're sharing workshop ideas, we're giving them projects that they can make and instructions and all of these different things and these beautiful women take these ideas and they can then become the expert and they go meet with their customers just like you did on your Friday nights and they take those projects and share them and they continue down this beautiful funnel of artwork being made everywhere. Another really cool part is, although we provide a lot of ideas that way, they provide ideas with one another and so they share workshops, they create their own workshop and then they share those with all the other Close to my Heart consultants and it becomes this beautiful community of artwork, ideas, inspiration and so much love and support comes from that. It makes someone who feels that maybe they aren't so creative or not so good at this, feel empowered to do it and let them feel, I can do this because the ideas are out there for me. I don't have to come up with everything myself and when you do it, you have this entire group that stands behind and tells you your art is so beautiful. It just really is this cool thing.

JB- I was going to talk about our facebook groups. We have a massive one that is for everyone and then what I love about that, is it brings in the global community. Where in the past it was like one market was this and one market was that. But with Close to my Heart really everyone is part of the same family and the same community. And it is a group of thousands of women, who have a passion for paper crafting and love sharing and love supporting each other. The other thing that I want to say is that one of our main taglines is "we are the let me show you how" company. We are about education and Janet Linton has done a beautiful job of doing a "how to" program, she has many "how to program" books. So if you don't know how to scrapbook or you're intimidated by it, we give you patterns, we show you how. Now we have a brand-new Storyteller product by Story by Stacy, as a "how to" program. So that's going to be part of our "how to" library.

SJ- I didn't even know if we could say that. I guess it's out! I'm super jazzed about it.

JB- Of course it's not going to be available until our catalog is live, May 1st. The community is the backbone, it's the heart of this business. And Janette Linton is still leading the company, leading with her vision and her heart and that level of creativity. And you know so many of our consultants are what we call "hobbyists". We love our hobbyists. So people don't need to feel scared or intimidated by signing up to be Close to my Heart consultant.

SJ- You have very successful directors, at the top level and it goes all the way down the hobbyists.

JB- That's really the majority of our company, thousands of them. Who just want a great discount and really high quality product. We are known for the quality of our products. Which is one of the reasons why we partnered with you Stacy, because we wanted to bring out our quality level with your amazing ideas. We have a lot of amazing history and a legacy and we're continuing moving forward conventions like these events. We love having events and we do regional trainings and seasonal launches and conventions and incentive trips. We have consultants who've seen all over the world. We've taken them on cruises, or to Tahiti or New Zealand.

SJ- This is what I thought about with me coming back to Close my Heart and this partnership after all these years, I had forgotten right about the community and everything that goes on behind the scenes and I think if you're just... maybe you're aware of Close to my Heart, perhaps you purchase products before you might have a consultant-but I don't think anybody has any idea. Unless you've really been with the company a long time. About everything that goes on behind the scenes. Like for example, how many training videos have we made in the last year with just Story by Stacy? 30-32? A ton. Education has already always been for me an important part of any product. From magazine days. So when I approached and I wanted that to be a part of it and you're like absolutely, that's what we do. We're the "show you how" company. So it's been so fun for me to come back and be reminded of how much there is available. So when you're a consultant, you login, to the back room of the website- "online office". You have access to a lot!

JB- We've taken real advantage of Facebook live. We do a lot of training, weekly trainings, weekly announcements. All that stuff through Facebook and Instagram and email and we have newsletters. We love communicating with our consultants.

SJ- Kim you have your own website as well, which is provided.

MW- What I love too is everyone is provided with exactly the same, it doesn't matter if you're a hobbyist or you want to be a business person, or you want to get to Director. So to get there, I start with the small team that I have and hopefully it will build. Like I said, everybody is treated the same and that is what I love. These girls, I wouldn't have known these girls 5 years ago and now they really do feel like family. The girls we meet here at convention, from New Zealand.

SJ- So, best part of convention so far, one day down, one to go.

MW- It's the community, it's meeting up with all these people. It's the new product, the new catalog that comes out, it's sharing with my team. I have some girls here with me. It's catching up with people I only see once a year. I could go on and on.

SJ- Okay so, we've come to that part of my podcast- is this only the second time that I've had people on with me- but I get so giddy about this part. It's called people, places and things. So we'll go around the circle one more time and just tell everyone listening either someone or somewhere or something that you're particularly excited about right now.

MW- I am so excited about all the new products that we're offering right now. We just launched our seasonal Expressions Two catalog. It's pre-launch and that's part of the joy and excitement of coming to conventions is that you get to be the first to see all the new stuff. So we have this massive beautiful idea book with so many ideas and tons of new products and Storyteller being one of them. And I think that's what's got me excited right now, I cannot wait to see what they do with all of these beautiful products.

JB- So I get to be like Kim and kind of do a run on, so I would say Australia which includes the people and the place. This is my fifth trip to Australia and everytime I just Janette, I will move here if you want. I just love everything about the cities that we visited and the beautiful country that this is, but the people are amazing. The consultants, of course, have just opened to us and opened our arms to us. When you walk around this place. It should be on everyone's bucket list to come to Australia. We like to travel a lot in our home. We love this place and these people, it's so true.

SJ- Okay Kim

KT- Keeping in the Close to my Heart theme, I would have to say a big shout to my two beautiful team members who came with me on this journey. The girls actually give up a lot of their time, their family time. It's for them and I love being with my team and sharing. Everything that we've said. Because it is such an amazing company. I cannot ever ever see myself leaving this company. Jeanette's not leaving, she's told us that. She's not going anywhere and neither am I. This is just the place to be.

SJ- That's just awesome. I'm having a great time as well. I'm not going anywhere. One more time around the circle, I want you to complete this sentence...we'll start with you Monica, Jill and Kim... I have exactly enough time to...

....celebrate

....scrapbook

....learn more about story

Thank you so much!

Okay, final thoughts... huge thank you to Monica, Jill and Kim I -of course- I am a huge fan of creativity and paper crafting especially where memories are preserved and stories are told. I have had such a great time over the last year and a little bit, sharing my vision, designing products, something I've never done and designing education, creating training videos and then of course traveling and teaching-all of it. I have loved my experience coming back to work with Close to my Heart. If you want to learn more about CTMH, their products and even the opportunity to become a consultant, I have included links in the show notes and if you're a blogger or a social media influencer and you simply want to work with their products. help them promote their message. I invite you to absolutely reach out to Jill, her contact information all of that can be found in the show notes. I just wanted to make sure that you knew how to do that if that's interesting to you. I also have included links to the products that I've been working on and that are available for anyone and everyone. So thank you for listening to episode 9. I'll be back next week with another episode and I will leave you today with my friend Kirsty Lee and another awesome down under expression. Hi, I'm Melvin Estrella from Australia and I'd like to say "good on you" and that means "well done, good job."