

“My life is a beautiful chaos”



Vincent Fantauzzo sits behind the wheel of his white Alfa Romeo Stelvio, en route to his home in a seaside suburb of Melbourne, when he takes a call from *Stellar* on the loudspeaker (hands-free, rest assured). It's a fitting scene in many ways given Fantauzzo has never done things conventionally, yet always manages to stay very much in the driver's seat.

The 41-year-old leads a life as colourful as one of his paintings. He is one of Australia's most successful artists, having taken out the Archibald People's Choice Award four times, most notably for his takes on Heath Ledger and Asher Keddie, who also happens to be his wife. The new Art Series hotel in Brisbane has been dedicated to his work, and his portrait of Julia Gillard hangs in Parliament House.

But if he is now a success, Fantauzzo admits to *Stellar* that he was not always certain it would be this way. He left school at the age of 13, his self-esteem battered in part because of his struggle with literacy – he is dyslexic. “School was extremely

He is one of Australia's best known artists, and calls Asher Keddie his wife – yet Vincent Fantauzzo struggled as a child because of dyslexia, a condition he tells *Stellar* has since morphed into a superpower

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OTHER PHOTOGRAPHY: ROBERT CATTO; SEVEN NETWORK.
GROOMING: JULIA GREEN; MAE TAYLOR. VINCENT WEARS HIS OWN CLOTHING

difficult,” says Fantauzzo. “I couldn't read or write. I got put in special classes and felt stupid. I had extreme anxiety about certain tasks, like copying from the board or reading out loud.”

Owing to his own experience, Fantauzzo is always keen to break down some of the stigma and confusion that often surround the condition. “A lot of people are ashamed of being dyslexic, but they shouldn't be. Dyslexia is a gift – a superpower,” he says emphatically. And he has taken a role as ambassador for the new Australian charity Code Read Dyslexia Network to help spread that credo. Navigating the school years as a dyslexic is not easy; according to the Australian Dyslexia Association, 95 per cent of adult dyslexics recall being either told they were, or they were made to feel, “dumb”, “lazy” or “stupid” by a teacher. “It breaks my heart that nothing has really changed,” Fantauzzo tells *Stellar*.

Although he no longer has to worry about reading out loud, dyslexia still impacts Fantauzzo's everyday life. Short-term memory is an issue (“If I could get back all the time I've spent looking for keys...”), he hates filling in forms and, although he listens to two audio books a week, the thought of actually reading a book from cover to cover “makes me want to vomit”.

He admits to a haphazard approach to organisation, pointing out that “I never document or plan anything. I fly by the seat of my pants most of the time.” In sharp contrast, his other half Keddie is meticulous. “Asher never forgets anything,” he says. “She is extremely organised; I'm the opposite. She understands that when I don't do something that she would have liked, it's not because I'm inconsiderate. I've just forgotten about it.”

As if on cue to perfectly illustrate the point, Keddie – having just arrived home in her own car – interrupts the interview by tapping on the window of Fantauzzo's vehicle, which is stationary now he's arrived at his destination.

“I have a dream job; I love my life. And I think a lot of it's due to being dyslexic”

“Don't forget to lock the car!” she yells before heading into their house. The couple met in 2012, when mutual friend celebrity chef Matt Moran suggested Keddie pose for Fantauzzo. They married two years later in a private ceremony on Fiji's Turtle Island with a single guest: Luca, Fantauzzo's then four-year-old son from a previous relationship (he's now

aged nine). The couple grew their family in 2015 when son Valentino was born.

Although they have wildly different approaches to life, Fantauzzo says they work well as a team. “We both have our strengths. With the kids, for example, I wouldn't have a clue how to log into the school website and find out what's happening, but I'll be up early and get lunches ready and do the school drop-off.”

“Asher knows what uniform they have to wear, and all that kind of stuff. If it was left to me, they would probably be turning up on the wrong day in the wrong clothes. It's a beautiful chaos that works.”

From the outside, *Stellar* suggests, the couple appear to be as loved-up now as when they first became an item. “That's not real,” he replies with a laugh. “It's just social media.”

Jokes aside, Fantauzzo says he and Keddie prioritise making time for one another. Sometimes that means cooking together or snuggling up to watch Netflix. “We're best friends,” he says. “I really appreciate the way Asher looks out for me. I see the beautiful things she does with the kids.” And he takes his own role as a parent seriously, too. “I want them to grow up with a clean slate being the best of who they can be. As parents, it's tempting to problem-solve everything for our kids. I've learnt that sometimes they don't want the problem solved – they just want to be heard. It's amazing... when you just listen to them and they feel acknowledged, the problem just goes away.”

And while dyslexia is hereditary, Fantauzzo does not think he has passed it on to his sons. “There is a fear of them having dyslexia because I don't want them to struggle [at school],” he says. “But then I think to myself, I live a really unique lifestyle. I have my dream job, and I'm successful at it. I love my life. And I think a lot of it's due to being dyslexic.” ★



BRUSH STROKES

(from top) Artist Vincent Fantauzzo with his portrait of Heath Ledger that won the 2008 Archibald Prize People's Choice Award; Fantauzzo, here aged seven, struggled in school as a child due to his dyslexia; with his wife, actor Asher Keddie, and children (from left) Valentino and Luca in 2017; (opposite) as photographed for *Stellar*.