



Jo Wilson interviews high profile couples on the Coast, Ted O'Brien and his wife Sophia with their three-week-old son, Henry.

PHOTO: PATRICK WOODS

# FINDING THE SWEET SPOT

A FEDERAL MP AND A LAW LECTURER COMBINE ALREADY HECTIC LIVES WITH RAISING TWO CHILDREN, SO IT'S NO WONDER THEY CHERISH THEIR QUIET TIME

WORDS: JOANNE WILSON

I was honoured this week to meet a couple of influential overachievers, Sophia and Ted O'Brien! Whilst they have been clearly gifted in the intellectual and fine looks department, what stood out for me was how they honour the values of their parents.

They enjoy a close-knit family with parents on both sides living incredibly close by as their gorgeous family expands. They have benefited from being raised by parents that clearly promoted integrity and sincerity. They've taken advantage of this to not only fulfil leadership roles in the community that will not only impact their own children but inspire generations to come on the Sunshine Coast and further afield. Enjoy our chat at one of their favourite locals, Hungry Feel Café in Buderim.

**Ted, due to your high-profile role as Federal Member for Fairfax and Sophia, lecturer in Law at the University of the Sunshine Coast, you're considered highly regarded Relationship Influencers. How did you come to be on our glorious Sunshine Coast in the first place?**

**Ted:** Thanks Joanne. My connection with the Sunshine Coast goes back to infancy. Since I was a baby, my family regularly spent weekends and holidays at our second home – a beach shack at Kings Beach, Caloundra. The tradition continues amongst my siblings and I... our friends laugh that even though Sophia and I live 15 minutes away in Buderim now, we still holiday at Caloundra.

**Sophia:** I grew up overseas and wasn't very familiar with the Sunshine Coast until I met Ted. He quickly got me hooked on the relaxed feel of the place, and before long we decided to aim for a permanent move here. It took a few years to find the right house, ensure we had career options locally and get settled in, but we have no regrets.

**How did you meet and how long have you been married?**

**Sophia:** We met by chance at a pub in Brisbane. Ted was brave enough to come and

have a chat, and it didn't take long for us to be mutually smitten. We were married just over a year later. We have been married for 12 years this year.

**You've both contributed to so many worthwhile causes. Ted, you've been Chairman of the Advisory Board for Ronald McDonald House Charities, an advisory board member for Queensland Catholic Education, and Founder and Chairman of local not-for-profit Generation Innovation. Sophia, you've worked for an International Crisis Group and also served on the Board of not-for-profit Sunshine Coast groups. What motivates you to invest so much energy into leading and inspiring others?**

**Ted:** Growing up the youngest of nine children, I've always seen myself as part of something far bigger and more important than I am. So it's always made sense to work as part of larger teams with a view to making a positive difference to causes I believe in.

**Sophia:** It's really satisfying to be part of something you believe in or care about, and to contribute to shaping the successes and future direction of those causes, even if only in a small way. It can be infectious when you meet great people and discover new opportunities to collaborate and make a difference.

**What is the highlight of your respective careers so far?**

**Ted:** This is a hard one. On a personal level, I suppose the highlight to date is that I now find myself doing precisely what I'm truly meant to be doing. When I take young people through the GI Challenge (Generation Innovation programme that unleashes young people's innovative genius), I talk about finding your "sweet spot" where your passion overlaps your ability. Well, I

reckon I'm now in my sweet spot, where my experience and skills in the business and community sectors are being put to good use in politics.

**Sophia:** I'm very happy to have found my way into academia from legal practice and policy work. It is really fulfilling and highly energising – whether in the lecture theatre, bouncing ideas back and forth with students, or researching and working on publications in my own interest areas or contributing to the Law School's engagement with the community, it's a real privilege.

**As Influencers, who have been your mentors or people you admire?**

**Ted:** My father first and foremost. Dad passed away some years ago and to this very day there is no person I seek to follow more than him.

**Sophia:** I look to our family too. Ted's "never give up" attitude and good humour is pretty

inspiring. Likewise, my parents' relationship and values, along with Ted's parents, have been very grounding and have given us the security and capacity to pursue our own passions.

**My heartiest congratulations to you both on the recent birth of Henry, younger brother of Alexandra. I would imagine there's a lot less sleep at the moment, resulting in not being the best versions of ourselves. How do you overcome those substandard days to fulfil your hectic roles?**

**Ted:** I survive those days of additional tiredness by thanking God for my wife Sophia. She's the one who does the really hard work. On those days when I'm really exhausted, I just tell myself to harden up and get over myself.

**Sophia:** I'm lucky to be on maternity leave for 12 months, so I'm free to relax and enjoy being mum to Alexandra and Henry

and appreciating the small things without worrying too much about work. It took a long time for Henry to come along so I am really savouring the experience and trying to laugh off the sleep deprivation and nappy explosions! We are also incredibly fortunate to have a great support network – having parents close by to help with the school run and being able to outsource little stressors like grocery shopping is a godsend. And Alexandra is a terrific big sister and an amazing helper.

**You're in the public eye and in the media, can you share any standout behind-the-scenes humorous moments?**

**Ted:** Where do I start? Lots of funny and weird stories, but since I'm usually the idiot in each one I'll steer clear of sharing them (for now).

**Sophia:** There are too many to count. We should write a book.

**What is the most challenging aspect of being a successful politician, lecturer and maintaining a great relationship?**

**Ted:** I think the trick is to always anchor to your true self and your own values and set of beliefs, and for me that starts with family anyway and thankfully Sophia is the same

**Sophia:** Time and distance apart can be tricky, but Ted has always been a busy person, so we have developed ways of coping. Mainly it's a matter of staying positive about it; accepting that long and intense work pressures are an unavoidable part of our shared life and that we just need to get on with things.

**What's the best advice you've ever received about relationships and who did it come from?**

**Ted:** Two pieces of advice. On the eve of our wedding, my Dad told us that my job was to help Sophia become the very best woman she can be and that Sophia's job was to help me become the best man I can be.

**Sophia:** Another O'Brien pre-marital