

Anxiety in Youth: Malia Baker Recovery and Road to Fame

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SPEAKERS

Michelle Horn, Narrator, Malia Baker, John Bateman

M Michelle Horn 00:00
Welcome to Where You Are. I'm Michelle Horn.

J John Bateman 00:02
And I'm Bryn Askwith.

M Michelle Horn 00:04
There are a lot of great mental health podcasts out there. And today on Where You Are, we wanted to share an episode from one of our favorites: Our Anxiety Stories, a podcast by Anxiety Canada. If you're curious to learn more about Anxiety Canada, who are a member of the BC Partners for Mental Health and Substance Use Information, visit anxietycanada.com. Here at the Kelty Centre, we often talk to parents and caregivers who are looking for support for their children struggling with anxiety. Anxiety Canada is one of our go-to resources for these families. Like the Kelty Centre, Anxiety Canada are leaders in developing free online self-help and evidence-based resources. Their podcast, hosted by John Bateman, highlights the experiences of people from all walks of life.

J John Bateman 00:49
As hosts of Where You Are, Michelle and I know how powerful hearing mental health stories can be. That brings us to the episode that we're sharing with you today. Released October 2021, this episode follows Malia Baker. Her journey with anxiety peaked in Grade 4. Malia offers great strategies that she's learned to manage her symptoms, along with the support of her mother, little sister, and friends. It's fantastic to have youth who are in a place to be able to share what's been helpful to them as they deal with their anxiety journey. And with our many parents

and caregivers listening on Where You Are, we thought it would be helpful for you as well to hear Malia's evolving journey. So, enjoy this episode from Our Anxiety Stories, and we'll be back soon with our season 3 finale of Where You Are.

N Narrator 01:39

This is Our Anxiety Stories, the Anxiety Canada podcast with John Bateman. This is the place where people from all walks of life share their anxiety stories to remind you that you are not alone. If you have an anxiety story you'd like to share, contact us at anxietycanada.com/ouranxietystories.

J John Bateman 02:03

I am John Bateman and this is Our Anxiety Stories, the Anxiety Canada podcast, which can be found at anxietycanada.com, and on most of your popular platforms. Malia Baker is best known for her role as Mary Anne Spier in the highly acclaimed Netflix remake of The Baby-Sitter's Club. Most recently, Baker also joined as a series regular on Nickelodeon's second season of Are You Afraid of the Dark? Botswana born and Canadian raised, Malia is a multi-talented actor who began her love of performing at the age of 3 through musical theatre and dance. Hi Malia.

M Malia Baker 02:34

Hi John, so nice to be with you today.

J John Bateman 02:36

Nice to have you. Thanks for doing it.

M Malia Baker 02:38

Of course! Thank you for having me.

J John Bateman 02:40

Okay, first questions first. Malia, what's your anxiety story?

M Malia Baker 02:44

Good question!

M Malia Baker 02:46

Myâ€”exactly. My anxiety story is something that I think is always adapting, completely irresolute. I grew up with severe anxiety and experience symptoms, from having hard times breathing to physically shaking and stomach issues. A lot of symptoms I feel like we all face from time to time, especially with anxiety being such a huge part of our lives starting at such a young age as well. I was very fortunate with my mom being educated on anxiety and giving me the resources and tools I needed to help cope. Although there were definitely moments I didn't want to listen, I don't know what I would have done without that knowledge. The biggest way my anxiety has impacted me so far was when I was in the fourth grade, and I developed CRPS. It's chronic regional pain syndrome. I couldn't walk for around seven months. I was in a wheelchair and it was caused by my anxiety. They couldn't diagnose me for a couple of months, because physically there appeared to be nothing wrong. It was this mental thing where my brain was telling my leg it couldn't work because everything was being built up inside of me. So I feel like that was the biggest waking up realization moment that, oh, I actually need to listen to these coping mechanisms, because it's gonna allow me to function properly compared to holding myself back in the long run. So that is my anxiety story in short.

J John Bateman 02:47
It really is.

M Malia Baker 02:48
Yeah, that was a rapid fire anxiety sorry, thank you! I've never heard ofâ€”okay, what was that condition called again?

M Malia Baker 02:59
Chronic Regional Pain Syndrome. Yeah, it's not well known at all.

J John Bateman 03:22
Right.

M Malia Baker 03:24
It's really, yeah, it was a really hard experience trying to figure out what I had as well. Like I said, it was a couple of months of just being completely in the dark, having tests, being hospitalized. And then finally, after so many treatments, and just trying to figure out what was going on, there was this woman I think, in like Halifax said, oh, I have the same thing! It's called CRPS, andâ€”

J John Bateman 04:35
That must have been a relief to hear that.

M Malia Baker 04:37

It really was. I was taken aback. And it was apparently, you know, if you have it, you can't really go back from that, it doesn't usually dissolve. So I was very, very fortunate in that sense.

J John Bateman 04:48

Yeah. So how did it justâ€”did you just wake up one morning, and it was there?

M Malia Baker 04:54

Yeah, it was. I mean, it sounds hilarious. Now that I think about it. Obviouslyâ€”

J John Bateman 04:59

No no, it sounds absolutely terrifying!

M Malia Baker 05:01

It does! I feel like the best way now is, I always crack jokes about it and everyone else is like, Malia, I think that's like an issue that you need to actually go into further deep talk about. But I was a dancer, so it felt like the end of the world for me. I was dancing 24/7. I was what, eight years old at this point? So I was, you know, active, having fun, like hanging out with my buddies, doing dance, going to school. And my schoolâ€”to get there, you have to go up so many rounds of stairs. So it was one day while I was at school, and I just felt my leg, and I was like, oh, this is bad. I don't. Like I don't know if I can go up all the stairs. And so I asked for the principal, I got sent home, I went to the ER. They couldn't find anything that was wrong with me. But then it felt like it was completely numb when I got home. And if it wasn't numb, then I was in pain. And there was aches. And that just went on for around a few weeks until we fully got into the investigation of what everything was going on is. And yeah, that went on for a few months. I was very lucky to be diagnosed. And then here I am today, walking, standing, dancing!

J John Bateman 06:09

That must have been anxiety-provoking. Yeah, I'm wondering, you know, you said you were 8, and you were doing a lot of dancing. Did you have, you know, do you feel you had stress from. From that? From sort of your lifestyle at that point, you know, even at that young age?

M Malia Baker 06:25

For sure. I mean, I feel like stress can creep up on us at any given moment, no matter your age.

It's always hilarious how many times people think that your age affects you compared to the amount of things that you've experienced. For me, I feel like "I mean, dance. I was a competitive dancer. It was more of a, I'm going to be a professional dancer when I'm older! That kind of headspace. And now, I don't think I'm gonna be doing that now. But when I was younger, that was my biggest goal. So I definitely think there would have been that stress with competitions. And then of course, school, that's always going to be a stressor for me specifically. Maybe it's not for other people. But having those impacts on a kid as well can just be, you know, if you've not taught that in school, in health, about like, this is anxiety, this is what you can do for it. Like I said, I was very fortunate. My mom was very well educated on what was going on, how to cope, how many mechanisms could have resolved a lot of situations for me. And so, in short, I definitely think that there's things that impacted my stress level for sure.

J John Bateman 07:29

What people often overlook is the fact that, for every young person that has anxiety, there's parents and siblings that are along for the ride. You know, because we love our children. We care for our children, want to help our children, obviously. So when you started, you know, I don't know, do you call it gaining mobility? Like, did it slowly come back, did the pain slowly go away? Or did you wake up one day, you know, I can walk!

M Malia Baker 07:57

Yeah, it was, it was pretty quick. I'm gonna be honest. I was with my little sister. She's almost four years younger than me. So she was with me, like you said, through the ride, through everything. She was my biggest supporter, and still is one of my best friends to this day. But she woke up one day, and she was like yelling for help or something. And I like, I walked over there. And she was like, what?! I'm like, what's going on?!

J John Bateman 08:23

Wow!

M Malia Baker 08:23

I know! And so that was just a big waking moment. And so I walked around my cul de sac in victory. And that's kind of just where it was that from that. I definitely had to regain my strength and muscles through, you know, seven months of not being able to walk or do any activity.

J John Bateman 08:39

There would have been some atrophy there, I guess.

M Malia Baker 08:41
For sure. Yeah. I've regained myself slowly and steadily. But after a year, I was fully inâ€”what's it called? I was all better!

J John Bateman 08:51
Remission, orâ€”?

M Malia Baker 08:52
Exactly, uh-huh.

J John Bateman 08:53
Cured?

M Malia Baker 08:53
Recovery. Exactly.

J John Bateman 08:54
Yeah. So you said you realized or that, you found out that this was sort of anxiety-related. What kind of...first of all, how did you learn about tools? What kind of tools did you get? Did you see a counselor? What kind of stuff happened that started you on that road to recovery?

M Malia Baker 09:14
Yeah, so I've really seeing counselors, since I've been pretty young. So I've always had that tools in my head at the back of my mind. My mom was also a yoga teacher. So she was always talking about breathing. And as much as that annoyed me and it still sometimes does, if I'm anxious or nervous, and she can see clearly that I am, she'll just tell me to take a breath. And I'm like, no, I'm fine! Just completely defensive. But in the long run, it does help for sure. So there's always been that back of my mind instilled kind of knowledge about anxiety and about mental health and of how to help myself cope through everything. And that's just kind of always been there and there's still so many things I need to learn about it because some things get washed away. Some things you just don't want to listen to. And while growing up, there's just a lot of things that you learn about yourself that could be taken into account of how to cope with the things that's going on in your life.

J John Bateman 10:11
.....

Well, life, you know, life evolves and changes, you know, by the minute as you know. And there's new things that pop up all the time that you could potentially, could potentially trigger anxiety.

M

Malia Baker 10:22

For sure.

J

John Bateman 10:23

You know, for you, you work at a high level as an actor. And what's that like for you? Does that, you know, does it do you find that anxiety has an effect at all with you when you're performing? Or do you feel like you've got that pretty much figured out with some of the tools you've been using?

M

Malia Baker 10:43

I feel like, at this moment, right now, I have some things figured out. The start, I did not whatsoever. I was very lucky, because the character that I first played, in the role that I first got, and it was a bigger role, and I got to play the character 24/7, was Mary Anne. And she was super, super anxious. So I did not need to act at all with that. It was kind of just method, in that sense.

M

Malia Baker 11:08

So it was exactly. It was this girl, going through puberty with a group of friends, a group of her best friends, anxious 24/7. And I was like, that's what I'm doing. Except I'm Malia. And this is a show. And yes, I'm with my best friends on screen. But this is pretty much life. It's relatable for sure. So I think that anxiety does happen on set, for sure. I mean, I feel like it would be kind of dumb if it didn't. There's always going to be that stress of nervousness or that anxious way of being on set. And I definitely still to this day, have that with me. 24/7. But there's ways because I love my job so much, that I'm able to push it down, or if not push it down, then to add it to my performance, or to just use it as a strength.

J

John Bateman 11:08

Haha, yeah, exactly.

M

Malia Baker 11:22

Yeah, so you do have anything that you go through, you know, is there, is there any kind of rituals you go through as you're getting ready to go on set or do a take? Forgive my language, I only know what I've seen on TV!

M

Malia Baker 12:13

No, it's "surprisingly you're doing it all good, trust me!

J

John Bateman 12:16

Okay! But do you have, do you have anything that kind of gets you? Because, you know, although your character sounds similar to who you really are. Do you, do you have any, you know, do you have a process that kind of gets you into that character?

M

Malia Baker 12:32

Yeah, for sure. I mean, when I'm with a group of people, like on *The Baby-Sitter's Club*, I feel like it's different for every set, and sometimes rebuilding that sort of ritual, like you said, that just comes from oneself. But on the set of *The Baby-Sitter's Club*, or even *Are You Afraid Of The Dark?* we were such a tight-knit cast that we were able to do these rituals together. So with *The Baby-Sitter's Club*, we would go to crafty, which is this little snack tent, and we'd be talking about the scene and how we're feeling to make sure that we're all okay. And then before almost every one of the bigger scenes, we would give each other a big group hug and then we would be like, okay, we're grounded, we got this, breathe. If we can see that we're anxious, we would hold hands, that kind of thing. I mean, we're still so close, to this day, I can hear my phone buzzing away. It's most definitely them.

J

John Bateman 13:16

Yeah, yeah.

M

Malia Baker 13:17

But yeah, for *Are You Afraid Of The Dark?*, there was that same type of tight, like, close-knit type of cast for the show, although it worked better, because we were supposed to be scared all the time. So we kind of used it to our strengths and pushed it. This most recent project that I was just on, which I cannot wait to share with everyone, but unfortunately can't yet. It was more of a by myself set situation. So I had to learn to do that ritual and how to prepare myself going into the scenes, especially if they're more draining or emotional or just mentally challenging. Just to have that ritual for myself to make sure that I'm stable going into it. And that I'm able to bring myself out of that headspace at the end of the scene. Because I feel like it's not talked about enough. When an actor goes into a scene where it's just so draining mentally, we're bawling our eyes out for hours on end, and then having to go back to that headspace of being professional and having a casual chat with the director. It's, it's mind boggling because it's such a drastic change in how you were five minutes ago. So learning how to do that ritual by myself was something very...I was just I was educated in a lot of ways. I was very fortunate to have a lot of older mentors to work with me on my last set. So I asked tons of questions about that. But my ritual kind of consists of drinking some water, doing some deep breathing. Sometimes "I got to work with the person that did meditation for every scene.

Soâ€”I know! It was pretty amazing to watch and to be a part of. I asked her how she did it. She kind of showed me the ropes of it and I got it. And so there's just so many techniques that I still get to learn. And I'm still figuring my way out. So there's nothing set yet. But for sure, there's some things that I switch off between.

J John Bateman 15:04

Well, all these techniques you're talking about are all techniques you could use, or anybody could use whose experiencing anxiety even, or that kind of, you know, pressure or stress, you know? These are all things you're talking about your deep breathing, meditation, communicating with friends, hugging. Whatever it might be, those are all things that really apply. Do youâ€”you know, so you're in school. In grade. How did your. You know, how was it with your friend group? Is it, you know, did you have a similar relationship with your actual, you know. I don't want to say the cast members aren't real friends. But, you know, the friends you grew up with? Are they all pretty transparent, pretty open about, you know, mental health stuff?

M Malia Baker 15:38

Yeah, the friends that I grew up with. I have a pretty tightknit kind of trio group that I hang out with right now. I mean, with COVID, it was crazy, not being able to see them 24/7. Since weâ€”god, I've known them since grade four? Around the time of CRPS. That's kind of how I was introduced to my new school. So they were very aware of my anxiety and my mental health. And I was aware of their's. Because they were able to share it with me, because they saw that I was a person that would be able to understand. And so being that way that I was kind of introduced to them, we're very open about it to this day, whether that's being stressed about school, being stressed about family issues, or friends, whatever it is, we're able to talk to each other, which I feel like in every friend group, it's one of the best ways to go. It's just having that security blanket almost. And like I said, The Baby-Sitter's Club, those girls are my chosen family 100%. But they're all, they're practically all in the US, so I can never see them.

J John Bateman 16:39

Aaaw.

M Malia Baker 16:39

I know, it's a bummer! But I'm just having my friends here as well that I grew up with, is something very important to me.

J John Bateman 16:47

Yeah. And it's, it's one of the things that I find really encouraging about your generation. Because my generation, we didn't really have as much of an open dialogue. If any. I mean, and also, you know, I'm a guy, you know, I often wonder, whatâ€”we have, I haven't interviewed

any really young men—you know, how open they are at, you know, middle school, high school, college ages. But it's, it is encouraging to hear that, you know, there's people out there that do share it with their friends, because that's one of the most important components. I'd like to switch to, quickly to some social media stuff, because you have pretty robust followings. And specifically, I guess, on Instagram, that's kind of a big one. Social media is something that's part of your life. It's part of your generation's life. You guys probably don't really have much of a memory of life before social media. So do you deal with the same kind of. What I'm trying to get to is. There's harassment and bullying, and so on and so forth on social media. Do you deal with that through your channels? Or, you know, how would you deal with that? That kind of stuff? If hopefully, you haven't. But you know, when you're getting into those kind of numbers, there's all kinds of people out there that want to have their voice heard for, for good or for bad.

M

Malia Baker 18:09

For sure. Yeah. I mean, with having a following that's bigger than just, I don't know, when I started, I got 1000 followers. And I thought that was, I hit the big stuff, I was, you know, I'm getting somewhere. And now looking where I am today, I feel like with that amount of people that are supporting my work and supporting who I am, there's of course going to be—it's inevitable, to not have those people that are going to try to push you down or just not think the same way as many of the other people. But I feel like focusing on the few that don't think that way, has been the most important thing to me. I've tried to honestly, nowadays, at first, it really got to me, I was just. I wasn't used to it. Of course, there were things in school beforehand and previously and just learning how to be myself with the world and just trying to manufacture this version of me that I wanted to put out as the representation of Malia Baker, actor, blah, blah, blah. It's just kind of like showing face all the time. And so, social media, like you said, it's a big part of my life and a big part of the younger generation's life as well. Like you said, I don't think a lot of people kinda recognize a time before it wasn't there, before Tik Tok wasn't there, before Instagram, before, whatever. So I definitely think that it's a big, it's a part of our atmosphere and that you can either decline it heavily or embrace it and try to use it to your benefit, which is what I've been trying to do with activism, especially on social media with a larger following. That's what I try to do. Is spreading awareness about mental health and my own anxiety, trying to tell my story, which is why I'm so grateful I'm here today, just advancing that even farther. Or you can just, you know, show what you're doing. It's. There's such a. It's this place that you can vary so much of. So there's just so many variables that can go with on social media, I've chosen a few. I do not particularly like posting selfies of myself on it 24/7. It's not something that I enjoy personally. It's something that I've had to kind of get used to over time, because apparently you have to show your face on social media, who knew that? So, there's definitely learning curves for me. And it's a process of trying to understand what it is like, since it is such a big part of our lives in 2021 especially. And in 2020, because of COVID. That was kind of the only way that we could connect as a collective, as humans. And so I definitely have faced some kind of, haters gonna hate, that kind of thing.

J

John Bateman 20:48

Yeah, yeah.



M Malia Baker 20:48

Exactly. But just trying to sidestep that. Focus on one goal and not have that push me down any farther as, you know, cliché as it sounds, it's kind of how it is.

J John Bateman 21:01

I think that would be good advice for anybody. Because, you know, it's. Everybody faces negativity, you know, whether you have 100 followers, or you have, you know, 300,000 followers, everybody faces it. So that's really good advice, you know, in terms of keeping your eye on on what your goals are, and what you want to do and what you want to project

M Malia Baker 21:21

For sure.

J John Bateman 21:22

Yeah. Malia, I want to thank you very much for joining me. Your story is great. And I just love the fact that we have young people like you with a voice advocating for anxiety, for mental health. It's, it's incredibly valuable, and it's just going to build and build over the next few generations. So thank you for that. And thank you for talking to me today.

M Malia Baker 21:43

Thank you so much for having me.

J John Bateman 21:45

Before I say goodbye. Your Instagram and Facebook.

M Malia Baker 21:49

Oh!

J John Bateman 21:50

Are @maliabakermsb. That's, that's right?

M Malia Baker 21:55

That is correct. Yeah.

J John Bateman 21:56
That's right.

M Malia Baker 21:57
You got it.

J John Bateman 21:57
Okay, good. So yeah, thank you so much for joining me, I hope to chat with again some other time.

M Malia Baker 22:02
Perfect. Well, thank you so much for having me. It was a blast.

J John Bateman 22:05
Okay, take care. In today's episode, we discussed how important family support can be when experiencing anxiety. If you're a parent or a caring adult looking to support a loved one, consider FamilySmart's In The Know. Every month FamilySmart host events called In The Know, facilitated by a parent peer support worker. They come together to watch a video or listen to a speaker and share experiences and strategies that help in the hard moments. Parent peer support workers help focus on strengthening and understanding and connecting with our kids. For more information visit familysmart.ca/itk.

N Narrator 22:49
Thank you for listening to Our Anxiety Stories. If you'd like to support this podcast or Anxiety Canada, go to anxietycanada.com.

M Michelle Horn 22:56
A big thanks to our friends at Anxiety Canada for letting us share this episode in our feed today. Are you a parent or caregiver looking for more resources and tips on supporting your child with anxiety? Listen to our podcast from season one on tackling anxiety. You can find the link in our show notes.

J John Bateman 23:43
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Michelle Horn 24:02

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John Bateman 24:12

We hope you'll make us a go to resource to promote your family's mental health and wellness, from where you are to where you want to be.