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This episode is sponsored by a company I've used for well over a decade and that is 511.

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I wore their uniforms back in Anaheim, California and have used their products ever since.

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From their incredibly strong yet light footwear to their cut uniforms for both male and female

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responders, I found them hands down the best workwear in all the departments that I've worked for.

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Outside of the fire service, I use their luggage for everything and I travel a lot and they are

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also now sponsoring the 7X team as we embark around the world on the Human Performance Project.

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We have Murph coming up in May and again I bought their plate carrier. I ended up buying real

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ballistic plates rather than the fake weight plates and that has been my ride or die through

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Murph the last few years as well. But one area I want to talk about that I haven't in previous

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sponsorship spots is their brick and mortar element. They were predominantly an online

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company up till more recently but now they are approaching 100 stores all over the US.

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My local store is here in Gainesville Florida and I've been multiple times and the discounts you see

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online are applied also in the stores. So as I mentioned 511 is offering you 15% off every

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purchase that you make but I do want to say more often than not they have an even deeper discount

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especially around holiday times. But if you use the code SHIELD15 you will get 15% off your order

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or in the stores every time you make a purchase. And if you want to hear more about 511, who they

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stand for and who works with them, listen to episode 580 of Behind the Shield podcast with

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511 regional director Will Ayres. This episode is brought to you by THORN and I have some incredible

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news for any of you that are in the military, first responder or medical professions. In an

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effort to give back THORN is now offering you an ongoing 35% off each and every one of your purchases

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of their incredible nutritional solutions. Now THORN is the official supplement of CrossFit,

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the UFC, the Mayo Clinic, the Human Performance Project and multiple special operations

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organizations. I myself have used them for several years and that is why I brought them on as a

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sponsor. Some of my favorite products they have are their Multivitamin Elite, their Whey Protein,

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the Super EPA and then most recently Cinequel. As a firefighter, a stuntman and a martial artist,

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I've had my share of brain trauma and sleep deprivation and Cinequel is their latest brain

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health supplement. Now to qualify for the 35% off, go to thorn.com, T-H-O-R-N-E.com. Click on

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sign in and then create a new account. You will see the opportunity to register as a first responder

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or member of military. When you click on that, it will take you through verification with GovX.

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You'll simply choose a profession, provide one piece of documentation and then you are verified

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for life. From that point onwards, you will continue to receive 35% off through THORN.

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Now for those of you who don't qualify, there is still the 10% off using the code BTS10,

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behind the shield 10 for a one-time purchase. Now to learn more about THORN, go to episode

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323 of the Behind the Shield podcast with Joel Titoro and Wes Barnett. Welcome to the behind

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the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Gearing and this week it is my absolute honor to

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welcome on the show firefighter wives and the women behind the dear chiefs podcast, Audra and

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Chelsea. Now this was such an important conversation. I have had spouses of first responders on the show

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before and sadly several of them are actually widows because they lost their loved one.

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In this conversation, we get to hear these two women's perspective on the things that are wrong

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about the way that our first responders are worked. And as we unpack this conversation,

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it's not about the job itself. Ultimately, it's about the conditions that our first responders

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work in and the impact of those work weeks on our loved ones. Now before we get to this incredibly

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powerful and absolutely important conversation, as I say every week, please just take a moment,

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go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave

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a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier

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for others to find. And this is a free library of over 900 episodes now. So all I ask in return is

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that you help share these incredible men and women stories so I can get them to every single person

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on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you Audra and Chelsea.

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Enjoy. Well, Audra and Chelsea, I want to say firstly, thank you so much for having me on

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your podcast, Dear Chiefs, a few months ago now. And secondly, I'm glad to turn the microphone

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around and welcome you onto the Behind the Shield podcast. Thank you for having us. Yeah,

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this is exciting. We like being on other people's podcasts. It's fun and you get to kind of impart

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some of the things that you've learned. So just very first question, where are we finding you

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on planet earth today? I'll start with you, Audra. I am in the Bay Area in California and it is not

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sunny here, despite what the background looks like. It is raining as it has been for like the

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last two months, I feel like. You don't want to see outside my window there. You'd be even more

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depressed. Sure, it's sunny as all hell over there. It is. It is. Well, Chelsea, what about you?
Where

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are you right now? So I'm in Mendocino on the northern coast of California and it is actually

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sunny today after months of rain. So maybe it's coming to me. There we go. There we go.

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All right. Well, I want to kind of lead both of you through kind of early life up to when you met

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your firefighters. So let's start with Audra. Tell me where you were born and tell me a little

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about your family dynamic, what your parents did, how many siblings? Oh, my gosh, I was born where

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I live. Still, I was born in. Well, I was actually technically born in Oakland, California, but we

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lived in Walnut Creek and then we moved to San Ramon when I was three years old. So I've lived

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here my entire life. Other than moving around a little bit with Damien when we first started

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dating or started living together, I have four siblings. Two are from my mom, two are from my

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dad. So I am the baby with one parent and the middle child with the other parent. So it's an

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interesting dynamic for us because I kind of get the different treatment from different parents,

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I guess. My parents got divorced when I was 18 months old. So it's fun. I love all of my siblings.

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They're incredible and also crazy like me. So it works out very well. And I had an interesting

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childhood, I guess you could say. I don't know. I mean, I grew up in the suburbs, so it was very

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closed off, but my mom grew up in the city. So we were in the city every single weekend, San

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Francisco for those who don't know what the city is. We were in the city every weekend with my

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grandparents. They died when I was very young, unfortunately, kind of back to back. So it's funny,

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my husband and I were just talking about this on our trip this weekend about like our childhood

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trauma, I guess you could say. From the time that I was 11 until I was 16, we had someone in our

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family die almost every year. And then I had some pretty traumatic experiences with suicide

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in middle school. That probably led me to having this podcast and talking a lot about mental health

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that I didn't really put together until I was much older. Yeah. So that's me in a nutshell.

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What about professions? What were your parents doing? Oh, my parents both worked full time. My dad,

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my biological dad was a teacher. And I don't remember much about that, to be honest with you.

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My mom and my stepdad both worked for it was Pacific Bell at the time. Now it's AT&T. But they

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were full time employees. My mom worked in the city. My dad, I call him a dad because he has

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worked in San Ramon. So he was taking us to school every day. I was a latchkey kid. So I walked home

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all my entire life. I can't even remember when I didn't I think maybe in kindergarten when I took

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the bus to the afterschool care, but they worked. And my brother and my sister pretty much took care

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of me every day. What about outlets? Were you a sports person? Were you a musician and artist?

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What were you doing when you were in school age? I played comp soccer from the time I was eight or

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nine until I was in high school. And then I danced and did cheer despite my mom probably not liking

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that too much. And then in high school, I stopped playing soccer and was on the dance team. And we

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did a lot of traveling for competitions and stuff. So I was a little sports sports kid. Did you ever

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compete in Disney in Orlando? I did. I used to work for the fire department that protects that area.

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And that was an overtime gig. But I never did it because the way people described it with those

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looping sound effect that soundtracks that you did it to these paramedics were richly ready to

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hang themselves by the time the day was done. So I never signed up. Yeah, I don't blame them. Honestly,

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now when I watch I'm like, Oh my god, this music. It's a lot. It's it's funny, but yeah, I did. It

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was fun. I loved it. But I didn't I didn't finish college. So I went to junior college right out of

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high school and then I never finished and I've been in insurance ever since I stayed home with

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the kids for nine years. And then went back to work and I work full time now. Beautiful. Well,

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Chelsea, same question. But tell me where you were born and tell me a little bit about your

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family dynamic. How many siblings and what did your parents do? So I was born in Ukiah, California,

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which is about an hour and 15 minutes from Fort Bragg where we live. So my mom got to go over

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highway 20. I'll just experienced that drive. It is not fun. And she and then so we live in Fort

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Bragg my entire life. Never really. Yeah, didn't move anywhere. And then my parents divorced when

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I was in fifth grade. So I was 12. And my mom remarried when I was no, I wasn't 12 fifth grade,

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I was 10. And then my mom remarried when I was in eighth grade. So I was roughly 13 years old.

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And she and her husband did not have any other children. And I was seeing I was a

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only child of my two parents. And then my dad remarried when I was in high school.

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And he had my sister when I was 18. And then my brother when I was 20. So there's a big gap

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between me and my siblings. And I don't really know them very well. I mean, I know of them,

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obviously, they're my siblings, but I moved away into college and didn't really have a relationship

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with them. So and now they're adults. So that's the story of my childhood really just kind of

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lived in the same place. Parents got divorced early. My mom was a pharmacy technician,

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and my father was a debarker in our local mill here on the coast.

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Debarker. So that's literally removing the bark of trees. Okay. Yes. That's just the first time

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I've heard that job description. Yeah, it's not a common job description. So I'm not surprised.

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I figured it was either word or dogs either way. Yeah. All right. Well, what about the sports arts?

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You know, what were your passions when you're going through the school age?

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So I was a ballerina from the time I was five until I was about 12.

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And then I didn't really do sports in middle school. In high school, I was a short distance

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runner for our track team for all four years of high school. And I gave up dance at 12 and never

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went back and I kick myself every day because of that. It was a big mistake.

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A lot of people say that, but I think at the same time, if you think about the wear and tear

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of a lot of these young athletes, maybe it was a good thing. Yeah. I mean, they wanted to put me

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into point and that was the end for me. I was not going to do point shoes and I could have

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done really well in it, but I just was terrified to mutilate my feet. And so

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that was the end of it. I think that's understandable. Well, then what about career

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aspirations when you were at school age? What were your dreams of becoming?

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So my grandfather was a veterinarian here on the coast and for a long time, I thought that that's

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what I wanted to do. And so I kind of went on a science kick. But when I was in high school in my

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senior year, I actually got pregnant with my first child who I ended up giving up for adoption.

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And so my career aspirations changed and I ended up after that, I ended up going to junior college

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and was going to decided that I wanted to be a teacher. And I never finished. I never finished

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school. But then after a couple of years, I actually ended up becoming a dental assistant,

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a registered dental assistant for my stepdad. So I did that for 20 years. And then more recently,

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I am now a professional photographer. So. Brilliant. My dad was a vet and resurgent.

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So I grew up around that and my son at the moment, that's what he wants to do. He's gunning for that

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at the moment. He's in a junior in school at the moment. With the adoption conversation,

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I've had surprisingly several guests recently who were pregnant when they were 15, 16.

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And so this kind of birth at a younger age is kind of, it's not something that's really discussed.

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Talk to me about what that decision was like for a young girl. And then, were there any

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ripple effects from that, even as we sit here now?

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I think starting out, I was terrified, right? Because I'm pregnant. I don't want to tell my mom.

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She's a very conservative Christian woman. And I kind of hit it for a long time. I hit it for

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six months. They didn't have any idea. And ultimately, I ended up graduating high school,

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which was really good, I think. And I was really, really happy about it. And I was

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really, really happy about it. And I knew that I couldn't keep the baby from the very beginning.

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Like I knew it was not something that I was going to be able to do at that age.

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And being from a Christian background, for myself, I would never abort a child. I don't

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have any feelings about anybody else's decisions on that, but that's just my personal choice.

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And so I knew that I couldn't keep the baby, but I didn't want to tell my parents.

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And so eventually, when my mom finally figured it out and I had to tell her,

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she shipped me out of Fort Bragg, because it's a very small town and there's a lot of opinions.

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And she didn't want anybody's outside opinions influencing my decision. She wanted me to be

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able to make that decision on my own, whether I was going to keep the baby or ultimately give him

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up for adoption. And I kind of struggled with, well, do I want to keep him or do I don't for a

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little while? And then I finally rested on, I knew from the beginning I couldn't. And so

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I was really at peace with that decision. When I gave him up, I went through an open adoption

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agency, a Christian organization. They're called Bethany Children's Services, and they're still in

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practice today. I met a family that I immediately connected with. We had a really good exchange and

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no ripple effects really, if we're being completely honest. I still feel very at ease

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with that decision. For a long time, I corresponded back and forth with

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the family. Every six months or so, I would get letters and emails and pictures. And when

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Nathaniel reached the age of 18, that kind of all stopped. And I'm okay with that. I feel like

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he had his own life. And while I was a part of it, I don't need to intrude on it. So we never did

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visits or anything like that. While they were available to me, I never felt that that was

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something that I wanted to do. So do you have ripple effects? No, I don't even it's, it's

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something that I talk about because I feel like you're right. It's not something that we talk

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about a lot. But it's not something that affects me in any kind of way. So

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I'm so glad I asked that question. Because they're I mean, I'm you know, what do I know,

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I'm a man looking from the outside in. But arguably, there's stigma around that choice.

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And what a beautiful story to maybe, you know, a young person is listening right now, that you

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know, this option ended up being exactly what it was supposed to do. You know, the child has a long

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healthy life and thrives and you get to kind of keep your finger on the pulse and know that

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they're doing well. So that's a beautiful answer. So thank you.

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Of course. All right, well, Audra, I want to go back to you now. Let's start bringing in firefighter

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relationships. So walk me through when you met your firefighter and then where where he was in his

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career at that point, because I know in your example, he wasn't a firefighter yet. He was not

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he was not even an EMT. He was nothing fire related. He was nothing. If he hadn't those two

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things, he was he was an interesting being when I when I met him. So I was 19 when I met him. It was

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my 19th birthday. He was working at a nightclub in the city and he was the front door supervisor.

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So he was doing security. And we were in the same department. We were in the same department.

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And we just whatever we hit it off. It was magical. It was really cute. It's a really cute

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story, but it's very long to tell. Anyways, I told him that night that I was going to marry him. He

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thought I was crazy. He wrote his phone number on a little code check ticket. And I have the code

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00:20:36,880 --> 00:20:46,480

check ticket somewhere in a frame in our room still. But he maybe a year after we started dating,

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decided he wanted to go to EMT school. One of his buddies that was also security was going to go to

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00:20:55,040 --> 00:21:00,320

EMT school and was like, Hey, you want to do this? And my husband was like, This sounds great. Let's

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00:21:00,320 --> 00:21:08,240

let's go ahead. So he went to EMT school. And then his buddy got hired on with King American

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00:21:08,240 --> 00:21:14,000

Ambulance Company in San Francisco and was like, Do you want to come work for this ambulance company

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00:21:14,000 --> 00:21:21,840

with me? And Damien was like, Sure, it sounds great. And he did that. And then he actually

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00:21:21,840 --> 00:21:28,080

wanted to be a police officer for a really long time. And I honestly struggled with that. I didn't

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00:21:28,080 --> 00:21:36,000

think I wanted to be married to a police officer. And so we talked about it a lot. And he decided he

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00:21:36,000 --> 00:21:43,280

was going to go to the fire academy. So he did a fire academy through one of the local colleges out

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00:21:43,280 --> 00:21:56,560

here. And then we got married right after the academy. And he ended up working on an ambulance

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00:21:56,560 --> 00:22:09,680

for AMR for several years in Oakland, up until we had our first. And then he got hired with the city

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00:22:09,680 --> 00:22:18,880

that he works for now. When we had our second, our second was three months old. And then he's

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00:22:18,880 --> 00:22:25,920

been with the department ever since. So he was on probation. I got pregnant again, was

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00:22:25,920 --> 00:22:32,160

it supposed to happen until he was off probation, but he finished his probation with the department.

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00:22:33,040 --> 00:22:41,280

And then I had a baby two days later. That was our last one. Yeah, yeah. So if you ask him,

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00:22:41,280 --> 00:22:45,600

he I don't think he ever thought about being a firefighter. I think there's stuff in his

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00:22:45,600 --> 00:22:54,640

childhood that I think is kind of partly why he went in the fire direction. I don't know if he

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00:22:54,640 --> 00:23:03,680

correlates the two or not. But yeah, nonetheless, now he's a fire captain and he's doing really well.

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00:23:05,680 --> 00:23:11,920

There's so many people in uniform that had, as one of my guests recently put it, he's the

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00:23:11,920 --> 00:23:17,120

psychologist for the seals. He like he's getting away from the word trauma and more with them.

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00:23:17,120 --> 00:23:22,160

Oh my god, what's the term you use not challenges, struggles, struggle, because you eat, you know,

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00:23:22,160 --> 00:23:27,280

it's a hurdle for you, whatever that looks like from being the middle child to sexual abuse,

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00:23:27,280 --> 00:23:31,600

it's a hurdle and you either, you know, kneel down in front of it or you find a way over it.

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00:23:32,160 --> 00:23:36,960

But so many of us have something in their childhood. And I look back, I was writing my

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00:23:36,960 --> 00:23:41,040

first book a few years ago and a door opened in my mind. It's like, you know, you were in a house

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00:23:41,040 --> 00:23:46,720

fire and almost died when you were four, right? I was like, oh, yeah, I forgot about that. That's

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00:23:46,720 --> 00:23:50,320

probably one of the reasons why I became a firefighter. Either you were terrified of fire

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00:23:50,320 --> 00:23:55,920

or you do the complete opposite. But, you know, if you if you didn't have that sense of security,

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00:23:55,920 --> 00:24:01,200

if you were preyed upon, then you want to be the protector and you want to be amongst a group that

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00:24:01,200 --> 00:24:06,160

has a purpose in the world. So it makes so much sense. I think this is what's sad when

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00:24:07,120 --> 00:24:13,280

some mental health conversations only include what we do at work and we negate what happened

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00:24:13,280 --> 00:24:18,960

before we ever put the uniform on. Oh, yeah, absolutely. I agree with you 100%. I think

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00:24:18,960 --> 00:24:22,960

10 years ago, I mean, Damien and I were not talking about this stuff at all. We weren't

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00:24:22,960 --> 00:24:28,560

talking about our childhood traumas or struggles. He was just working and putting his head down.

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00:24:28,560 --> 00:24:32,080

He said that we just had him on the podcast recently. He even said it. He was like,

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00:24:32,640 --> 00:24:38,320

I was one of the rubs and dirt on it kind of dudes where I was like, nah, this isn't affecting me.

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00:24:38,320 --> 00:24:45,440

And now looking back, he's like, oh, shit. OK. Yeah, this all ties together. I think it's

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00:24:45,440 --> 00:24:52,000

it's the invisible string for sure. Absolutely. Well, before he became a firefighter under the

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00:24:52,000 --> 00:24:59,680

actual banner, I would imagine that the the frequency and intensity of calls as EMT or

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00:24:59,680 --> 00:25:06,320

paramedic in Oakland, California, were probably pretty substantial, removing the fire from the

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00:25:06,320 --> 00:25:12,480

equation. So before we get into Firewife, staying with you for a second order, what about EMT wife

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00:25:12,480 --> 00:25:19,840

in that position? When he was a paramedic with Oakland, it was literally the scariest time of

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00:25:19,840 --> 00:25:26,800

our life. I mean, and I probably say our life, but he was in love with it. He would go back on the

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00:25:26,800 --> 00:25:37,280

ambulance in a heartbeat. He was a he worked nights in Oakland and the two and a half years that he

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00:25:37,280 --> 00:25:49,680

was actually in Oakland were the deadliest years on record. So it was insane. His partner, actually,

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00:25:49,680 --> 00:25:56,080

we still talk to him. He is an amazing human being. He went on to be a nurse, but they were

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00:25:57,280 --> 00:26:03,440

both adrenaline junkies. Totally. I think, you know, they were still in their late 20s,

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00:26:03,440 --> 00:26:12,400

so they were still very much like, very excited on every single call. They loved being busy. They

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00:26:12,400 --> 00:26:18,960

loved the chaoticness of it all, I think. I don't even know how to describe it. But I was scared to

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00:26:18,960 --> 00:26:30,080

death. I mean, I was still working full time. And he was gone every night. And so he would come home,

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00:26:30,080 --> 00:26:37,680

I would leave for work. And he would take a little nap. And then he would deal with our youngest at

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00:26:37,680 --> 00:26:48,080

the time. And our stepdaughter was with us part time, I think, at that time. So he was exhausted

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00:26:48,800 --> 00:26:58,960

all the time. And doing a lot of things he probably shouldn't have done to stay awake and to

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00:26:58,960 --> 00:27:09,440

go to work. But it was a crazy time. I honestly, I probably blocked a lot of it out because it was

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00:27:09,440 --> 00:27:13,520

just like, every day he would come home and tell me some crazy story. And I'm like, there is no way

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00:27:13,520 --> 00:27:17,440

that happened. And then you see it on the news a couple hours later, and you're like, Oh, my God,

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00:27:18,880 --> 00:27:24,240

are you okay? And he's like, Oh, yeah, no, it was great. Like, we joke about it all the time. Now,

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00:27:24,240 --> 00:27:27,440

with the kids, when we're driving through Oakland, he's like, that's where I got shot at. And I'm

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00:27:27,440 --> 00:27:32,960

like, Oh, my God, please don't tell me that I don't ever want to be on the street again. Or he'll

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00:27:32,960 --> 00:27:39,680

tell us, you know, about some crazy calls. And he's like, I remember I was holding this guy's

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00:27:39,680 --> 00:27:44,560

brain together on the you know, in the middle of the street. And I'm like, I'm trying to eat dinner,

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00:27:44,560 --> 00:27:53,120

can we talk about this later? Like, but I mean, if he if you had him here today, he would tell you he

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00:27:53,120 --> 00:27:58,640

would go back on that ambulance on a heartbeat. He actually he loved the streets of Oakland. He

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00:27:58,640 --> 00:28:05,600

was just Yeah, that was like his best time of his life, I think, oddly enough. I don't know if he

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00:28:05,600 --> 00:28:12,080

would be able to. I mean, I'm sure he would be able to do it now. But anyways, yeah, chaotic time in

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00:28:12,080 --> 00:28:16,960

our life, for sure. It's, it's definitely harder when you're older. I'm sure he's finding that now.

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00:28:16,960 --> 00:28:23,440

But this is what I think is such a an important part of the conversation. You've probably heard,

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00:28:23,440 --> 00:28:27,760

I don't know if it's as prominent in California, I don't remember it being as big when I worked

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00:28:27,760 --> 00:28:34,000

Anaheim. But there's this kind of chest beating, I don't want to do EMS, I just want to do fire.

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00:28:34,000 --> 00:28:38,880

And you save lives in the back of an ambulance, you just do. That's the truth, rescue, whatever

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00:28:38,880 --> 00:28:43,440

you want to call it. That's where we actually save the lives. So I love my time on the rescue. I love

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00:28:43,440 --> 00:28:47,920

my time being a tillerman and all these other positions that I had in the fire service. But

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00:28:47,920 --> 00:28:52,880

that is where you actually put your hands on human beings and try and pull them from the jaws of

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00:28:52,880 --> 00:28:58,240

death. So I totally get it. And the, you know, the more exciting, the more bloody, the better,

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00:28:58,960 --> 00:29:04,480

you know, up to a point until you know, you that cup is full, and you need to kind of take a step

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00:29:04,480 --> 00:29:12,080

back and let another young buck or or buck s fill your spot. Absolutely. Absolutely. Yeah.

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00:29:12,080 --> 00:29:17,840

All right. Well, Chelsea, back to you. You're the beginning of your relationship. I know there's a

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00:29:17,840 --> 00:29:25,120

slightly different dynamic with the volunteer firefighter. Well, he was a volunteer firefighter.

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00:29:25,120 --> 00:29:31,200

I didn't have any idea of that at the time, because when I met my husband, he was a minister

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00:29:31,200 --> 00:29:42,000

in a Baptist church. Really? Yes. So he was actually volunteering at the time with one of

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00:29:42,000 --> 00:29:49,120

the volunteer fire departments here on the coast. But yeah, he was not a firefighter when I met him,

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00:29:49,120 --> 00:29:59,280

or at least a career one at that. So we so I signed up for, you know, him being home all the time,

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00:29:59,280 --> 00:30:02,800

really, if you think about it, Baptist ministers, I mean, they're not home all the time, but like,

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00:30:02,800 --> 00:30:11,680

essentially, they're in the home more than they're outside of it. So when we had our first baby,

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00:30:11,680 --> 00:30:16,080

he decided that it was not going to pay the bills, like it was not going to be something he could

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00:30:16,080 --> 00:30:20,560

support his family with. And he didn't want that. And so he ultimately went back to firefighting,

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00:30:21,360 --> 00:30:28,640

or the fire service, I should say, because when he started back with Cal Fire, in 2008, he actually

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00:30:28,640 --> 00:30:37,600

went into his communications operator. So we did communications operations for eight years. And then

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00:30:37,600 --> 00:30:47,120

he ended up out in the field as a firefighter to paramedic, he did that for a little while,

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00:30:47,120 --> 00:30:53,920

and then ended up going back to communications operation. And then ultimately for a couple years,

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00:30:53,920 --> 00:31:01,280

and then ultimately got out as an engineer. So he Yeah, not set up for that.

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00:31:01,280 --> 00:31:09,360

Communication operator is that the dispatch? Yeah, so it's dispatch. Okay, that's they call

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00:31:09,360 --> 00:31:14,720

it the communication operator with Cal Fire. Okay, yeah, it's essentially fire dispatch.

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00:31:15,280 --> 00:31:19,760

So again, before we get to the fire side, I've had several dispatches on here. One was Beth

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00:31:19,760 --> 00:31:24,720

Bowersox, who was a dispatcher for the Paradise Fire, and you can see and she was also a resident

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00:31:24,720 --> 00:31:30,240

of Paradise. So you imagine the absolute mental trauma of listening to people begging for their

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00:31:30,240 --> 00:31:35,120

lives and then you watching your own community devastating your own neighbors kill them in a

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00:31:35,120 --> 00:31:40,640

very powerful story. What did you witness as the wife of a firefighter who was working in

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00:31:40,640 --> 00:31:50,880

communications and the impact of that? Cameron's really good at his job. So

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00:31:50,880 --> 00:31:58,480

he's really good at it and he really likes it. So the impact, I don't really know how to answer

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00:31:58,480 --> 00:32:07,520

that question. I don't, he doesn't really talk about how it affected him as a firefighter being

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00:32:07,520 --> 00:32:13,840

in communications operation. I think he kind of went into it and it just became what he did and

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00:32:13,840 --> 00:32:21,840

who he was. Because that's really your first line of defense in fire, right? You're taking the phone

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00:32:21,840 --> 00:32:30,640

call and you're deciding where the engines are going, which ambulance to send, whatever.

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00:32:32,400 --> 00:32:37,760

And so he just did his job, like he just for eight years. It wasn't, I don't, I think that there were

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00:32:37,760 --> 00:32:43,920

calls that affected him. Like if I had been there, I could have, I could have done something, but it,

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00:32:44,720 --> 00:32:47,680

yeah, I don't know. I don't know. I don't really know how to answer that question. I'm sorry.

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00:32:47,680 --> 00:32:54,880

No, I'll put it a different way. So what I observed from my friends in dispatch is firstly, if I

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00:32:55,520 --> 00:33:01,520

went to a call with your husband's on an engine and it was an extrication and someone was bleeding to

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00:33:01,520 --> 00:33:08,320

death inside, or it was a house fire, someone was hanging out the window, or it was a cardiac arrest,

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00:33:09,200 --> 00:33:14,400

we would have a physical exertion. We would see the beginning, the middle, and maybe even the end.

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00:33:15,120 --> 00:33:20,000

So the stress and adrenaline and cortisol and all these things that are coursing through us,

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00:33:20,000 --> 00:33:26,240

there would be a way of alleviating that. Now put a person in a dispatch center sitting in a chair,

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00:33:26,240 --> 00:33:31,040

they have an adrenal response, a cortisol response, but no way of offloading it. And it seems like I

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00:33:31,040 --> 00:33:35,760

hear over and over again, no real way of knowing what happened next. You know, the person was

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00:33:35,760 --> 00:33:41,120

begging that the paramedics are here and then you don't know after that. Then you add in a third

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00:33:41,120 --> 00:33:46,240

element. I don't know if he did 12th or not, but a lot of our dispatches are working in a dark room.

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00:33:47,200 --> 00:33:52,880

They may enter when it's still dark and then when they leave, it's still dark. So

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00:33:52,880 --> 00:33:57,200

these are areas that you don't hear a lot of people talking about, but our dispatches work in a very

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00:33:58,160 --> 00:34:02,560

unhealthy environment. And again, someone's got to do the job, but the same way I advocate for the

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00:34:02,560 --> 00:34:07,120

fire service, the same for our dispatches. They need exercise, they need time in daylight,

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00:34:07,120 --> 00:34:12,160

they need to be able to set their circadian rhythm. So that would be more of my kind of

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00:34:12,160 --> 00:34:17,360

focus on the why is that having been a firefighter out on a rig in the daylight,

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00:34:17,360 --> 00:34:23,120

you know, what he felt the pros and cons were of the way that dispatches worked in Cal Fire.

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00:34:26,720 --> 00:34:34,880

Okay, so I want to address the beginning, middle and end, because in his experience,

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00:34:34,880 --> 00:34:42,640

he was always really good about following up. So when he took the call and he EMD'd it or he

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00:34:42,640 --> 00:34:49,600

dispatched it, he would make sure to follow up with whoever was on the engine to find out

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00:34:49,600 --> 00:34:59,680

what the end result of that call was. And so I think that firstly, in dispatch, you have to

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00:34:59,680 --> 00:35:05,200

advocate for yourself on that. Doesn't have to be the end, you can get you can get answers.

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00:35:05,200 --> 00:35:12,800

Secondly, yes, they do work in very dark situations. I feel very depressed when I walk into a dispatch

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00:35:12,800 --> 00:35:18,640

center as a civilian. And I never really understood that I'm like, you have computer screens, yes,

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00:35:18,640 --> 00:35:26,480

but you can turn on the lights, like, why are the lights not on? And so his shift started at 7am and

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00:35:26,480 --> 00:35:32,320

ended at 7pm. And so he was like, I'm going to go to the hospital. And he was like, I'm going to

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00:35:32,320 --> 00:35:39,120

go to the hospital. And so his shift started at 7am and ended at 7pm. So in the summertime, he got

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00:35:39,120 --> 00:35:44,960

out when there was still light out. But you're right, they do they enter in the dark and they

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00:35:44,960 --> 00:35:57,280

leave in the dark. He chose to do night shift. And he did that because of various personal things.

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00:35:57,280 --> 00:36:06,000

He was able to see him during the day. He was able to get sleep during the day, surprisingly.

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00:36:07,920 --> 00:36:14,560

And he, you know, night shift tends to be a little less chaotic, for whatever reason, there's less

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00:36:14,560 --> 00:36:23,600

calls. And so he, you know, that's just how he did it. He also was really good. And I think I've

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00:36:23,600 --> 00:36:28,240

talked about this on other podcasts, but he was also really good about like, okay, so I'm working

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00:36:28,240 --> 00:36:33,280

night shift, I'm sleeping during the day, but I still need to keep on my regular eating schedule.

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00:36:33,280 --> 00:36:37,520

So I'm going to wake up at noon and I'm going to have lunch. He ate breakfast before he went to

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00:36:37,520 --> 00:36:41,200

sleep. And then he got up at noon, ate lunch, and then got up again at five, eight dinner, and then

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00:36:41,760 --> 00:36:46,640

ended up staying awake and going to work. So he tried to keep on that regular eating sleeping

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00:36:46,640 --> 00:36:52,400

schedule that we're all accustomed to. So the circadian rhythm really wasn't so much of an issue

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00:36:52,400 --> 00:36:59,120

with him, because he knew that about himself. So I'm probably not the best person to talk about that,

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00:36:59,120 --> 00:37:02,320

because he just kind of did the things he knew he needed to do.

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00:37:04,320 --> 00:37:07,760

That's good, though. I mean, he found solutions to some of the problems. That's great to hear.

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00:37:08,960 --> 00:37:12,720

Yeah. And then he because of his background in

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00:37:12,720 --> 00:37:19,120

family and child therapy, he actually went to school and got a bachelor's degree in

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00:37:20,080 --> 00:37:26,320

family and child studies. And so obviously, he has a lot of background in mental health.

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00:37:27,600 --> 00:37:33,200

So because of that, he kind of ultimately knew that he needed to have that follow up. So he

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00:37:33,200 --> 00:37:36,800

wasn't constantly thinking about what could have gone wrong or what could have been better or

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00:37:36,800 --> 00:37:44,720

whatever. And so and he's also and so is D now part of the CISM team. So he has that background

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00:37:44,720 --> 00:37:49,200

as well. So I'm not the best person to tell you the things. I guess.

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00:37:49,760 --> 00:37:53,840

Yeah, no, no, that's great. What about chaplaincy with him being in the ministry before? Did he

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00:37:53,840 --> 00:38:00,160

take over that too in the fire service? He did for a long time. He was he did some chaplaincy

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00:38:00,160 --> 00:38:05,120

actually for Cal Fire there. They're called the Cal Fire. So he was a very, very, very

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00:38:05,120 --> 00:38:11,280

good senior for Cal Fire there. They don't call them chaplains because they can't. But he the

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00:38:11,280 --> 00:38:16,720

unit chief at the time when he was in the communications operator role really wanted

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00:38:16,720 --> 00:38:21,920

there to be a designated person for that. And Cameron was the perfect guy for the job. So they

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00:38:22,480 --> 00:38:29,520

he did do that. And he still gets called up every once in a while to go be part of the CISM teams

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00:38:29,520 --> 00:38:31,120

for larger incidents.

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00:38:31,120 --> 00:38:32,280

So.

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00:38:32,280 --> 00:38:33,320

Brilliant.

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00:38:33,320 --> 00:38:36,320

All right, well, Audra, I'm gonna go back to you.

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00:38:36,320 --> 00:38:39,480

I have talked a lot about the Firefighter work week.

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00:38:39,480 --> 00:38:42,120

I think I talked about it when I was on your show as well.

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00:38:42,120 --> 00:38:43,920

I do not wanna load the question first.

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00:38:43,920 --> 00:38:48,080

So tell me as far as the work week, what Damien works,

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00:38:48,080 --> 00:38:52,040

and then are you experiencing any kind of mandatory

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00:38:52,040 --> 00:38:53,800

over time at the moment?

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00:38:53,800 --> 00:38:55,400

Yeah, sure.

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00:38:55,400 --> 00:39:00,400

So their schedule is 4896, they actually started

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00:39:00,840 --> 00:39:01,920

at the year he got hired.

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00:39:01,920 --> 00:39:04,800

So this, I mean, we came from Cal Fire

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00:39:04,800 --> 00:39:07,160

where it was like 96, maybe 48.

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00:39:08,760 --> 00:39:12,860

So 4896 is pretty much all our family knows.

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00:39:12,860 --> 00:39:14,320

Is it a true 4896?

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00:39:14,320 --> 00:39:19,320

No, it is not, because it's never the same.

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00:39:19,960 --> 00:39:23,320

Currently they are down three spots.

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00:39:23,320 --> 00:39:27,880

So there are constant forces and we call them forces.

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00:39:27,880 --> 00:39:29,120

We don't call them mandos.

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00:39:30,600 --> 00:39:32,040

And there's a pretty significant amount

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00:39:32,040 --> 00:39:32,880

of overtime right now.

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00:39:32,880 --> 00:39:37,880

So he is on for 72 right now,

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00:39:39,680 --> 00:39:44,680

and he'll be on for another 72 next week as of right now.

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00:39:46,560 --> 00:39:51,560

Yeah, I mean, I'll say, I don't wanna say we're lucky.

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00:39:51,560 --> 00:39:54,560

He right now is at the very slow station.

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00:39:54,560 --> 00:39:59,560

I say slow, like maybe they run five to seven calls a day,

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00:39:59,640 --> 00:40:00,480

maybe.

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00:40:02,480 --> 00:40:07,480

So for him, he, I mean, it's hard to explain.

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00:40:09,880 --> 00:40:12,160

He's always ready to go.

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00:40:12,160 --> 00:40:15,280

So he's always in that flight mode when he's at work,

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00:40:16,280 --> 00:40:18,160

but he has a lot more downtime.

381

00:40:18,160 --> 00:40:22,560

And the crew that he's with right now is amazing.

382

00:40:24,080 --> 00:40:27,160

So when he's got his regular crew on his 48s,

383

00:40:28,360 --> 00:40:31,680

they play pickleball, they have a lot of PT time.

384

00:40:31,680 --> 00:40:33,560

They shoot the shit.

385

00:40:33,560 --> 00:40:38,560

They are very tight with the entire shift.

386

00:40:38,560 --> 00:40:42,560

So they have a lot of good camaraderie in their shift,

387

00:40:46,200 --> 00:40:47,760

which is so helpful.

388

00:40:47,760 --> 00:40:50,360

There's a lot of internal crap going on,

389

00:40:50,360 --> 00:40:52,160

but we won't talk about that today.

390

00:40:52,160 --> 00:40:56,000

But yeah, it's very rare that he's not working

391

00:40:56,000 --> 00:40:57,960

at least two overtime a month.

392

00:40:58,960 --> 00:41:01,160

What is your perception of that?

393

00:41:01,160 --> 00:41:03,200

Coming from the civilian world

394

00:41:03,200 --> 00:41:06,760

where the average person works a 40 hour week,

395

00:41:06,760 --> 00:41:08,320

and I'm not talking about entrepreneurs

396

00:41:08,320 --> 00:41:11,560

that work 2000 hours a week and never sleep

397

00:41:11,560 --> 00:41:14,560

and do ice baths for 12 hours, but normal people,

398

00:41:14,560 --> 00:41:18,560

40 hour work week, when you look at your first responder

399

00:41:18,560 --> 00:41:21,960

husband who's working a 56 before mandatory,

400

00:41:21,960 --> 00:41:24,760

so an 80 the week he does an extra 24,

401

00:41:25,760 --> 00:41:27,760

how does that look through your eyes

402

00:41:27,760 --> 00:41:29,760

and the understanding of it,

403

00:41:29,760 --> 00:41:32,160

of the people that are actually saving lives,

404

00:41:32,160 --> 00:41:34,160

working arguably sometimes double

405

00:41:34,160 --> 00:41:36,160

the work week of a civilian?

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00:41:36,160 --> 00:41:37,360

Yeah.

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00:41:37,360 --> 00:41:39,760

I mean, for us, it's all we know.

408

00:41:39,760 --> 00:41:44,760

Especially coming from Cal Fire and from summers

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00:41:44,760 --> 00:41:45,760

in California.

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00:41:46,760 --> 00:41:49,160

So 48 is like nothing.

411

00:41:52,560 --> 00:41:57,560

When they add that extra day, it's a little intense.

412

00:41:57,560 --> 00:42:01,160

It definitely shifts the family dynamic, I would say.

413

00:42:01,160 --> 00:42:02,960

But for me, as a civilian,

414

00:42:02,960 --> 00:42:04,560

I work 40 hours a week right now,

415

00:42:04,560 --> 00:42:10,760

and I am exhausted every single week.

416

00:42:10,760 --> 00:42:12,760

And I don't have an EMS job.

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00:42:12,760 --> 00:42:14,960

I work in insurance, so it's pretty boring,

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00:42:14,960 --> 00:42:16,760

but it's still exhausting.

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00:42:16,760 --> 00:42:21,760

So as a civilian, knowing what I know,

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00:42:22,760 --> 00:42:30,760

it's very easy to be judgmental.

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00:42:30,760 --> 00:42:35,760

It's very easy to be judgmental of people who don't get it.

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00:42:35,760 --> 00:42:41,760

And it's very easy for me to say very not nice things

423

00:42:41,760 --> 00:42:47,760

to people when they start talking badly about their pay,

424

00:42:47,760 --> 00:42:50,760

how they get to sleep at work,

425

00:42:50,760 --> 00:42:55,760

how they're sitting in their chairs all day.

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00:42:55,760 --> 00:42:57,760

And yeah, thank you, recliners.

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00:42:57,760 --> 00:42:59,760

That stuff drives me nuts

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00:42:59,760 --> 00:43:06,760

because I know firsthand the toll it takes on them

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00:43:06,760 --> 00:43:10,760

mentally, physically, spiritually, you know,

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00:43:10,760 --> 00:43:14,760

relationshiply, everyly you can possibly think of.

431

00:43:14,760 --> 00:43:21,760

So it's interesting to me.

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00:43:21,760 --> 00:43:26,760

And I don't know, I know you've done a lot of studies on shifts,

433

00:43:26,760 --> 00:43:30,760

and we actually had a pretty interesting conversation

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00:43:30,760 --> 00:43:35,760

with some of the spouses on our podcast or on our Instagram page.

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00:43:35,760 --> 00:43:40,760

Just the difference between every department

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00:43:40,760 --> 00:43:44,760

and their hours is just so bizarre to us.

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00:43:44,760 --> 00:43:46,760

We were both just like, what?

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00:43:46,760 --> 00:43:51,760

I don't even know how other departments do it.

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00:43:51,760 --> 00:43:54,760

Like, I know there was one in particular,

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00:43:54,760 --> 00:43:55,760

I think he was Miami Dade.

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00:43:55,760 --> 00:43:58,760

He was like, I've never worked more than 24 hours in my entire career.

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00:43:58,760 --> 00:44:00,760

I'm like, what is that like?

443

00:44:00,760 --> 00:44:02,760

Like, how are you mentally?

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00:44:02,760 --> 00:44:05,760

Because we're over here and our guys in California,

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00:44:05,760 --> 00:44:11,760

our guys and girls in California are literally dying

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00:44:11,760 --> 00:44:13,760

because they're exhausted.

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00:44:13,760 --> 00:44:16,760

They are so sleep deprived.

448

00:44:16,760 --> 00:44:19,760

They are so mentally just overloaded.

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00:44:19,760 --> 00:44:27,760

They are just, I mean, I don't even know how to put it into words.

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00:44:27,760 --> 00:44:32,760

Just the amount of shit that we've heard and seen over the last four years

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00:44:32,760 --> 00:44:35,760

has just been really eye opening.

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00:44:35,760 --> 00:44:37,760

Just eye opening.

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00:44:37,760 --> 00:44:39,760

It's just crazy.

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00:44:39,760 --> 00:44:42,760

The fundamental question that I ask people is,

455

00:44:42,760 --> 00:44:45,760

explain to me why the people that wake up

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00:44:45,760 --> 00:44:49,760

and literally jump into a vehicle, drive lights and sirens,

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00:44:49,760 --> 00:44:53,760

to your choking child, your parent that's trapped in the back bedroom

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00:44:53,760 --> 00:44:56,760

as their building burns, whatever it is,

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00:44:56,760 --> 00:45:01,760

that you think that they need to be working 56 hours a week, 80 hours a week,

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00:45:01,760 --> 00:45:06,760

but you, the person who's making those decisions, needs to go home at five.

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00:45:06,760 --> 00:45:10,760

And it's because the profession, 100 years ago,

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00:45:10,760 --> 00:45:13,760

we did sit around smoking cigars, playing cards,

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00:45:13,760 --> 00:45:17,760

and waiting for an occasional fire once, twice a week maybe.

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00:45:17,760 --> 00:45:21,760

And so, yeah, hanging out with your crew for 24, 48.

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00:45:21,760 --> 00:45:23,760

It wasn't a big deal, I'm sure.

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00:45:23,760 --> 00:45:28,760

But as you said, take that 48, forget 72, take that 48.

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00:45:28,760 --> 00:45:36,760

Now sandwich four of Damien's Oakland ambulance shifts together.

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00:45:36,760 --> 00:45:38,760

That's what we're working today.

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00:45:38,760 --> 00:45:39,760

That's the difference.

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00:45:39,760 --> 00:45:41,760

And it's a huge, huge difference.

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00:45:41,760 --> 00:45:43,760

And this is what I'm really excited.

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00:45:43,760 --> 00:45:47,760

I'm so excited at the moment because the dominoes are falling in Florida,

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00:45:47,760 --> 00:45:48,760

and I'm getting messages now.

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00:45:48,760 --> 00:45:50,760

Someone just messaged me from Virginia.

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00:45:50,760 --> 00:45:53,760

There's another one, I think it was New England.

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00:45:53,760 --> 00:45:55,760

We just went to 24, 72.

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00:45:55,760 --> 00:45:58,760

And all that is is a 42-hour work week.

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00:45:58,760 --> 00:46:01,760

And the crazy thing is these departments are realizing

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00:46:01,760 --> 00:46:04,760

that they're actually saving a huge amount of money

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00:46:04,760 --> 00:46:07,760

because you can't work people the way that we worked in the fire service

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00:46:07,760 --> 00:46:09,760

because they fall apart.

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00:46:09,760 --> 00:46:13,760

And that comes at a cost, a financial cost, a lawsuit cost when we make mistakes,

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00:46:13,760 --> 00:46:14,760

I mean, all these things.

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00:46:14,760 --> 00:46:19,760

So people are finally kind of awakening now, like we have to do something to change.

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00:46:19,760 --> 00:46:23,760

And when you throw in a mandatory, people don't understand that's 24 hours,

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00:46:23,760 --> 00:46:29,760

that's another entire day that you have stolen from a mother or a father

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00:46:29,760 --> 00:46:33,760

for time with their husband, wife, partner, children, whatever it is.

488

00:46:33,760 --> 00:46:36,760

And it's like shoulder shrugging, well, we're short staff.

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00:46:36,760 --> 00:46:38,760

No, it's unacceptable.

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00:46:38,760 --> 00:46:43,760

Yep. It is pretty unacceptable.

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00:46:43,760 --> 00:46:48,760

It's definitely something we struggle with over here in California, for sure.

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00:46:48,760 --> 00:46:52,760

Yeah. Well, hopefully, I mean, we have Florida, man, all the bad stories,

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00:46:52,760 --> 00:46:56,760

but I'm hoping that Florida will be a beacon of hope when it comes to the American fire service.

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00:46:56,760 --> 00:46:58,760

So we shall see.

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00:46:58,760 --> 00:46:59,760

All right. I hope so.

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00:46:59,760 --> 00:47:01,760

Chelsea, let's go back to you then.

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00:47:01,760 --> 00:47:07,760

So kind of that question, your husband's work week and then the staffing levels at the moment.

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00:47:07,760 --> 00:47:14,760

Well, the last time we spoke on our podcast, my husband was still working for Cal Fire.

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00:47:14,760 --> 00:47:16,760

He's no longer doing that.

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00:47:16,760 --> 00:47:18,760

Well, at the moment, at least.

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00:47:18,760 --> 00:47:26,760

And he is an assistant director of an emergency command center in Marin County.

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00:47:26,760 --> 00:47:32,760

He works a 40 hour work week, four tens.

503

00:47:32,760 --> 00:47:34,760

And he doesn't go on calls.

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00:47:34,760 --> 00:47:40,760

So. And he doesn't get overtime and he has to get forced on duty.

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00:47:40,760 --> 00:47:45,760

So contrast that contrast that with where he was working and then tell me,

506

00:47:45,760 --> 00:47:49,760

has he noticed a difference now he's sleeping in his bed every night?

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00:47:49,760 --> 00:47:53,760

He's not sleeping in his bed every night while he's not sleeping at home every night because he stays.

508

00:47:53,760 --> 00:47:56,760

Where the hell is he?

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00:47:56,760 --> 00:48:01,760

So they set him up with a nice little makeshift apartment so he doesn't have to drive

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00:48:01,760 --> 00:48:05,760

to Marin County is a three and a half hour drive from here to home.

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00:48:05,760 --> 00:48:07,760

So he couldn't be doing that every day.

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00:48:07,760 --> 00:48:09,760

That'd be insane.

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00:48:09,760 --> 00:48:15,760

So he is sleeping at night, but not in his bed at home.

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00:48:15,760 --> 00:48:19,760

Contrast that to.

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00:48:19,760 --> 00:48:28,760

Before he left Cal Fire and transitioned to Marin, he at one point had been forced on for 30 days straight.

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00:48:28,760 --> 00:48:32,760

So that's 30, 24 hour shifts for those that you don't know.

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00:48:32,760 --> 00:48:41,760

And while 12 of that was considered downtime where he could go to sleep,

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00:48:41,760 --> 00:48:45,760

he wasn't always sleeping that whole 12 hours or whatever.

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00:48:45,760 --> 00:48:49,760

So he was stuck at work for 30 days straight.

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00:48:49,760 --> 00:48:54,760

They gave him a couple of days off for like a weekend off.

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00:48:54,760 --> 00:49:00,760

And then he was looking at being forced on duty for an additional 90 days.

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00:49:00,760 --> 00:49:02,760

Insane.

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00:49:02,760 --> 00:49:08,760

Insane. And in the time that that happened, his grandmother passed away.

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00:49:08,760 --> 00:49:15,760

And he took a really bad call of a colleague that ultimately died in a motorcycle accident.

525

00:49:15,760 --> 00:49:22,760

And he finally got to the breaking point of I can't handle this job right now at all.

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00:49:22,760 --> 00:49:29,760

Goodbye. And he was so stressed out that he was like, I went to work because his grandma died.

527

00:49:29,760 --> 00:49:33,760

So I met him at work and, you know, tried to be supportive.

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00:49:33,760 --> 00:49:38,760

And I got there and he was literally shaking.

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00:49:38,760 --> 00:49:43,760

And I.

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00:49:43,760 --> 00:49:48,760

Apparently, they had something happened and they took a call and it didn't go well.

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00:49:48,760 --> 00:49:53,760

And he kind of lost his temper with the staff, which is something that he never did as a captain.

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00:49:53,760 --> 00:49:56,760

And they told me about it. And I'm like, this is not this is not going to work.

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00:49:56,760 --> 00:49:58,760

This is not you at all.

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00:49:58,760 --> 00:50:02,760

And so he ended up finishing out his 24 hour shift and coming home.

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00:50:02,760 --> 00:50:06,760

And then when he came home, I said, you need to go see someone like you need to go talk to someone.

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00:50:06,760 --> 00:50:09,760

You need to go see a doctor. You need to do something.

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00:50:09,760 --> 00:50:12,760

And so ultimately, he ended up going to his general practitioner.

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00:50:12,760 --> 00:50:16,760

And she told him, you're like, you can't go back to work.

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00:50:16,760 --> 00:50:20,760

In this state, this is not going to work. You have got to stay home.

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00:50:20,760 --> 00:50:26,760

And so she put him on a 30 day.

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00:50:26,760 --> 00:50:30,760

30 day.

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00:50:30,760 --> 00:50:33,760

Absent then said, you're not going back to work for the day.

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00:50:33,760 --> 00:50:38,760

That's it. And during that time, he started to sleep better.

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00:50:38,760 --> 00:50:42,760

He wasn't as stressed out.

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00:50:42,760 --> 00:50:48,760

He was able to process his emotions over the line of duty death.

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00:50:48,760 --> 00:50:53,760

And so he ultimately decided that he didn't want to go back.

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00:50:53,760 --> 00:51:00,760

And he one day started looking at what was available in his profession.

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00:51:00,760 --> 00:51:05,760

And the ECC assistant director position popped up.

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00:51:05,760 --> 00:51:10,760

And ultimately, he decided not to go back to Cal Fire during his leave of absence.

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00:51:10,760 --> 00:51:17,760

So, yeah, 30 days on duty is not OK at all.

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00:51:17,760 --> 00:51:21,760

And that's not uncommon in Cal Fire.

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00:51:21,760 --> 00:51:26,760

I'm being completely honest when Audra said it was a 72 hour shift.

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00:51:26,760 --> 00:51:30,760

What did you say? 42, 70? I don't remember what you said. 48, 72 or whatever.

554

00:51:30,760 --> 00:51:33,760

Yeah, 96, 48.

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00:51:33,760 --> 00:51:40,760

Yeah, maybe if you're lucky, you're not working more than your 96 hours.

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00:51:40,760 --> 00:51:45,760

So, yeah, it's they operate.

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00:51:45,760 --> 00:51:48,760

I believe this is my personal opinion.

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00:51:48,760 --> 00:51:50,760

I'm not representing any facts in this.

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00:51:50,760 --> 00:51:55,760

I believe they operate on drawdown. On purpose.

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00:51:55,760 --> 00:51:57,760

Yeah, it's a complete false economy.

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00:51:57,760 --> 00:51:59,760

And this is a problem. And I've talked about this a lot.

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00:51:59,760 --> 00:52:03,760

I did community college classes and economics is one of them.

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00:52:03,760 --> 00:52:06,760

And that's the only term I remember from that entire class.

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00:52:06,760 --> 00:52:08,760

I was kind of flirting with the girl the whole time.

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00:52:08,760 --> 00:52:11,760

But was that term a false economy?

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00:52:11,760 --> 00:52:14,760

You know, it looks cheap. Dollar General is a perfect example.

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00:52:14,760 --> 00:52:18,760

You buy that plastic toy for your child and then two days later, it's in pieces.

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00:52:18,760 --> 00:52:20,760

You know, it was cheap, but it didn't have value.

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00:52:20,760 --> 00:52:25,760

And it's the same with this. We've worked and worked and worked and worked our people.

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00:52:25,760 --> 00:52:27,760

And we're really good at burying them. Oh, my goodness.

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00:52:27,760 --> 00:52:33,760

Bagpipes and bells and, you know, all the things, majestic churches and flags hung from ladders.

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00:52:33,760 --> 00:52:38,760

But we're absolutely awful at preventing them from getting sick and dying in the first place.

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00:52:38,760 --> 00:52:47,760

One of the most heartbreaking things, if just on the cancer side, I just had a firefighter who was given a stage four cancer diagnosis.

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00:52:47,760 --> 00:52:51,760

And we had talked and he was going to come on the show.

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00:52:51,760 --> 00:52:57,760

And then his his it was his wife's his husband's.

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00:52:57,760 --> 00:53:01,760

Let me say it again. It was his friend's wife. That's what it was.

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00:53:01,760 --> 00:53:04,760

She kind of notified me that he had slipped into a coma.

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00:53:04,760 --> 00:53:09,760

And and that was it. We lost. I say we they lost him, you know, like three weeks later.

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00:53:09,760 --> 00:53:12,760

This is the reality of what happens to these men and women.

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00:53:12,760 --> 00:53:17,760

You know, the suicides, the overdoses, the cancers, the heart disease, the strokes, all the things that are supposed to happen.

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00:53:17,760 --> 00:53:30,760

The apart from cancer, which shouldn't happen to anyone. The other things, you know, maybe when you're in your eighties and nineties and they're happening, the young, young, young first responders and the common denominator is the shift work.

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00:53:30,760 --> 00:53:35,760

And we have to be awake at night. Someone has got to hold the line when everyone else is sleeping.

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00:53:35,760 --> 00:53:40,760

The only way we can do it healthily is to give them the rest and recovery between the shifts.

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00:53:40,760 --> 00:53:46,760

And what's happened is the opposite. You know, we're doing less with more with less, more with less, more with less.

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00:53:46,760 --> 00:53:50,760

People leave and the ones staying are asked to do even more with even less.

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00:53:50,760 --> 00:53:57,760

And we're at this critical mass. And I think the recruitment crisis is an absolute red flag of you've got a choice.

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00:53:57,760 --> 00:54:01,760

You either fix this finally or you don't have a fire service anymore.

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00:54:01,760 --> 00:54:09,760

Good luck with your next election, you know, county or city official, because no one's fucking voting for you next time.

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00:54:09,760 --> 00:54:15,760

Amen. OK. Yeah, for sure. That's 100 percent.

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00:54:15,760 --> 00:54:20,760

I wonder how Gavin Newsom feels now. That's kind of.

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00:54:20,760 --> 00:54:23,760

But it's across the board. It's not just a California issue.

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00:54:23,760 --> 00:54:30,760

It is a nationwide issue where Damien said a couple of years ago, he said, like, it's not sexy anymore.

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00:54:30,760 --> 00:54:34,760

This is not a sexy job. This job literally will kill you one way or another.

594

00:54:34,760 --> 00:54:38,760

They will find a way whether it's out of exhaustion, cancer.

595

00:54:38,760 --> 00:54:42,760

Yeah, it's killing you from the day you put on the turnout. Yeah. Yeah.

596

00:54:42,760 --> 00:54:52,760

So there you go. And it's the administration that continued to feed the BS that you can handle it.

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00:54:52,760 --> 00:54:56,760

It's not that big of a deal. Your family will understand.

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00:54:56,760 --> 00:54:59,760

It's all that's all bullshit. It's all bullshit.

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00:54:59,760 --> 00:55:03,760

Or actually just don't have a family at all because you can't do that, too.

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00:55:03,760 --> 00:55:10,760

Or you shouldn't. Well, let's talk about that because I want to I want to I want to illustrate the impact because you guys are.

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00:55:10,760 --> 00:55:12,760

And I'm not just saying this is some cliché statement.

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00:55:12,760 --> 00:55:20,760

You are the unsung heroes of the fire service, the husbands, the wives, the children, the parents, whoever's kind of holding the line

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00:55:20,760 --> 00:55:28,760

when we are physically removed geographically to another place to protect our community, arguably strangers.

604

00:55:28,760 --> 00:55:33,760

We leave our loved one number of times I've driven towards a hurricane, knowing that it's bearing down on my family.

605

00:55:33,760 --> 00:55:38,760

That's a shitty feeling. So it's you guys that hold the line.

606

00:55:38,760 --> 00:55:41,760

You know, when we're gone, you're single parents, you know.

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00:55:41,760 --> 00:55:49,760

So talk to me about and it's not in any way, shape a sob story or a victim mentality at all.

608

00:55:49,760 --> 00:55:59,760

Talk to me about the reality of being, in your case, mothers when your loved ones are in the station for days at a time.

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00:55:59,760 --> 00:56:01,760

Well, we'll take this one real quick, Chelsea.

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00:56:01,760 --> 00:56:08,760

I know we feel very strongly about not calling it a single mom because there are plenty of people who are single moms and it's totally different.

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00:56:08,760 --> 00:56:14,760

Single parents. So we call it default parent.

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Thank you to Dr. Morgan Cutlett for bringing that beautiful word to our our brains.

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It's the default family, I guess, at home is I mean, we've talked about this a thousand times on the podcast.

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It's. I don't even know, like my train of thought just left the building.

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So the default family is, you know, mom or dad goes to work and they go to work at eight and they get off at five. Right. Like, yeah, that nine to five.

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Working nine to five. What a way to make a living.

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And that's just simply not ever going to be the case for us. And we know that. Yeah.

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And that has some repercussions, I think, when you have kids that were just now, I think, discovering Audra and I have had some similar experiences in our homes.

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It's like, I don't know. So.

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I don't remember what the question was. Well, go into that for a second. What I mean, for all the parents that are listening to this, what are the similar experiences that are assuming are somewhat related to the job?

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So we both have teenagers now. What Chelsea, your youngest is 12.

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So all of our kids are either teenagers or adults at this point. And I think for me personally, it's funny or not funny.

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It's ironic, really, that the kids now.

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Ask dad not to work overtime.

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When they were little, they were like, where's dad always at work? OK, you know, whatever.

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But now they're like, why are you going to work again? You just got home.

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Like, what do you mean? When are you going to be home again?

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And it's nice because it's not just me that is like, oh, my God, are you kidding? You're working again.

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But it also is. It's a terrible feeling to know, like, OK, mom, is dad going to be off for my play?

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Is dad going to be able to find coverage for, you know, my soccer game or who's taking me to this because I know you're busy and I know dad's at work like.

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Stuff that I don't think I don't know if kids who don't have a first responder parent do.

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I mean, I guess because I don't know, you know, but.

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It's really interesting now to see kind of the dynamic of the way the kids are.

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Now that they're older and they're a lot more understanding of the job.

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They thought it was really cool when he, you know, when they were younger and now.

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I don't want to say they hate it, but they are they hate it a lot more reserved about it.

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You can say they hate it because they hate it. They don't love it.

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They don't they don't love it. They have a very.

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They would prefer dad be home every day for sure.

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They would prefer my would prefer he just didn't work in the fire service at all.

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Like if we're being the boys are like, I will. So one of my kids is very much like their father.

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In the fact that they are a pyromaniac and an adrenaline junkie.

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And I've he's 13. So, you know, when they get to be 13 going to be freshmen in high school,

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we start talking about what do you think you want to do for a living?

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You know, what do you guys what are your plans?

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And we were just having this conversation the other day and he's like, I.

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You know, if we're building a bonfire outside, he's the first to go want to light it when we do burn pile.

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He's the first one to go do it.

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And so I'm like, you know that you could actually do that and get paid for it. Right.

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And he's like, what do you mean? And so I'm like, well, you could work for you could be a brush or you could do brushers

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like a hand crew with Cal Fire or the US Forest Service.

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And he's like, I don't ever want to work for either one of those ever.

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Because I actually want a family and I actually want to see my family like.

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When your 13 year old hits you where it hurts. Sucks. It sucks. Yeah.

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You you raise these kids thinking that they are their dads, their hero, and they want to be just like him and they want to follow in his footsteps.

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I think the early statistic that I read when I first when Cameron first went back to Cal Fire was that if you had three kids, two of them would go into either EMS or fire service or whatever.

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That's just simply not the case.

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None of my kids want to do what their father does for a living ever.

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You know, I have three boys. So what does that tell you?

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Do you not have any desire to do it?

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One of my military guests just made the same observation when your children grew up when we were in Iraq and Afghanistan, basically from their inception through to 18, 19, 20.

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How many of them look at that, the withdrawal, these things and go, that seems like a good idea.

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And it's really interesting because when you gave the it was a beautiful description, but how bright eyed we are when we're tiny and the fire engine comes to your preschool or your elementary.

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That is the perfect analogy for what my generation and prior thought when we joined the fire service.

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There was no discussion on mental health, barely anything on cancer, as far as I remember early on the impact on the family divorce rates, et cetera, et cetera.

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And I'm not saying the doom and gloom because all we had was that this is the best job in the world.

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And it is it is. But your kids weren't saying I don't want that to come home because he was at that fire.

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Your kids said, I don't I'm sorry. I don't want that to be a firefight anymore.

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It wasn't about the job. It was about the work week.

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And this is what I try and illustrate to people. If we fix the work week, if we give these men and women a 42 hour work week where they go to a 24 and then for 72 hours, they have the ability.

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And obviously, if we fix it where people are lining up out the door like they were when I was testing 20 years ago, then you also are fully staffed then.

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And so when Steve or Jennifer come off shift, they more often than not, you know, barring a massive wildfire or a hurricane or something where, yes, we have to kind of grab our gear and do the extra stuff that we are going to be home for the 72 hours.

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That means more birthdays, more Christmases, more ballet events and soccer games and bar mitzvahs or whatever the thing is that is important to you.

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And so this is a really important perspective because it's not the job that hurts their, you know, that not only hurts them, but pushes them away from wanting to do it themselves.

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It's the way that we work our parents in this case that actually is the issue.

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It's the time.

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It's the time that you cannot get back.

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01:04:10,760 --> 01:04:12,760

Yeah.

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01:04:12,760 --> 01:04:17,760

Well, yeah, and, you know, we talked about the 30 days on duty.

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Like, ultimately, he's like, my kids are in high school.

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Like, I missed their whole freaking childhood, right?

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Because I was forced on duty for all of these days at a time.

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And it's just not a price that they want to pay anymore.

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You know?

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Well, another question for you, I want to get to the transition from being on shift to off.

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I think that's a really important conversation.

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But before we do, obviously, you've talked about, you know, the immense hours that both of your husbands are away from you, from the children.

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I have a kind of perspective.

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A lot of us know that salty guy or girl in the fire station, you know, the one that's angry, the one that does suddenly, you know, erupt.

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And I always ask people, OK, what were they like when they got hired?

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If they were like that when they got hired, you probably shouldn't have hired them in the first place.

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But if they say, oh, man, they used to be so just fired up, they were aggressive, they were kind, they were the firehouse joker, whatever it was.

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01:05:22,760 --> 01:05:31,760

And so now you go, OK, so we took a person who was, you know, this kind of person, and then 10, 15 years later, they're a different kind of person.

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And the number of times that I've seen with my own eyes, my firefighter friends madly in love with this woman.

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And then fast forward 10, 15 years, they're on the phone to me in tears as their marriage is falling apart and they cannot put the pieces back together again.

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So you're still obviously with your, you know, your husbands. But what have you seen as far as the impact of the job on, you know, whether it's intimacy, a marriage or whether it's the ability to be a parent from the person that you both talked about when you first met before they entered the fire service?

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I don't even know where to start with this.

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I don't know for me in particular. Well, I take that back, actually. So like, if you look at it, our life together and his kind of timeline of work and where he started versus where he is now.

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He's always been a go getter and very excited about his career choice.

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But there's definitely been some points in his career where he wasn't the man that I married and I didn't know who he was.

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And I think if we had not gotten to a place of understanding mental health, there might have been a chance in there somewhere where I would have left.

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And we've talked about this many times we go to a counselor. We're very open about therapy.

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It's very, very hard when you know, there's a you think you're on this trajectory of life with your partner and then your partner is gone for a lot of the time and you're doing everything by yourself.

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01:07:33,760 --> 01:07:47,760

And they come home and they're mentally checked out or they're doing things that you don't want in your marriage.

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You know, whether it be, you know, substance abuse or, you know, other things, you know, it's one of those situations where you're like, I'm we're either going to deal with this or we're done.

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01:08:07,760 --> 01:08:16,760

And we're very lucky. I mean, he's lucky that I stayed. No, I'm just kidding.

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01:08:16,760 --> 01:08:22,760

We are very lucky that we were able to realize like, no, we do want to work this out.

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Like we do love each other. You know, we can fulfill our marriage together.

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We love our family and we just genuinely like being together.

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So we have to figure out how to make this work.

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And you have to go talk to someone because I don't understand a lot of this stuff and I can only do so much for you.

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So you have to go talk to somebody on your own. We'll work on the marriage part, but you got to work on your shit and I'll work on my shit and we'll come together.

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And so for the people who are unable to realize these things.

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And I mean, there's plenty of situations where you're going to get divorced because the boundary has been crossed and it can never, you know, you can never undo that.

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And there's plenty of situations like domestic violence, all those things, substance abuse. If they don't want to take responsibility for themselves. Yeah, you need to leave 100%.

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And that's just true for any relationship. But there's an ownership for everyone in the relationship to take.

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And we're I'm very lucky that my husband did and that we decided together that we were going to figure out how to make it work.

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And we work on it. Marriage is so fucking hard.

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01:09:51,760 --> 01:10:08,760

It is so hard and it is a thousand times harder for the first responder. And that's just my opinion because there's a lot of times when they're not there and you have to be able to trust them and you have to be able to communicate.

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Otherwise, it's not going to work.

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It's just not. That's all I got.

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Chelsea, same, same kind of question. You know what, what you observe from, you know, pre fire to to now.

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I would say the same. I would echo what Audra said like my, you know, we've been married for 15 years now.

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And there have been times in our marriage when I had no idea who I was looking at or what is this the person I even was married or want to be married to.

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And you kind of have to make a decision that you're either going to love this person or you're not.

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01:10:57,760 --> 01:11:04,760

You're going to stay with this person or you're not. And you're going to do the work to make it work.

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And it hasn't always been easy. And there have been many times where I've thought about leaving.

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Let's just be completely honest. Many times. And I just recently had this conversation with my kids, you know, leaving would be the easy thing to do.

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That would be the thing that would get me the freedom and from the worry and all of the things that go along with being a first responders wife.

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Staying is the real strength and the real the real heroism, I believe, as a first responder spouse.

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Because it would be really easy to give up, right?

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You're already I don't like using this word, but I'm going to use it because I was a single parent, so I'm allowed to use it.

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You really are a single parent, like, essentially, especially when your husband's working 30, 40, 90 days in a row.

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And if you're going to be like my thought process with this whole thing has always been if I'm going to be a single parent, I will be one. Right.

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And that would be so much easier, I think, than putting in the work and staying.

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But you have to choose. You have to choose to fight. You have to choose to go to therapy. You have to choose to be with each other.

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And that's a kind of sometimes a hard choice to make.

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But you have to make it every day, sometimes three or four or five or 10 times a day. Right, Audra?

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And I think that there are a lot of marriages in this field fail because of that, not because necessarily they don't love each other.

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But I think we get into the marriage with this false idea of what the fire service really is.

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We've seen Backdraft. We've seen Chicago Fire. Right.

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I say this a lot. And now, *Lauder 59* or whatever the hell the show is.

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It's so over glamorized. So over glamorized. And I think that's the picture that is needed for you when you become involved with a firefighter.

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And if that firefighter isn't telling you the truth about their job, like, hey, babe, you're not going to see me for 30 days in a row, most likely.

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Those are not those are not the pictures that are being painted when you're in your very like first dates or even the first year of your relationship with a person.

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And so we have this glamorized idea. Oh, they're going to go to work, go to work and they hang out with their cronies and they have a great time.

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And maybe there's a call or maybe there's not. And the rest of the time they're hanging out in the bar. Right.

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01:14:12,760 --> 01:14:18,760

Isn't that what we see on TV or they're hanging out at the family barbecues or whatever.

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01:14:18,760 --> 01:14:25,760

And so you think that that's what life's going to be like. They're going to go to work for their 48 hours. They're going to come home and it's going to be glamor.

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No, that's not what it is at all.

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01:14:28,760 --> 01:14:35,760

So, um, no, you get you get what's left over at the end of their shift.

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01:14:35,760 --> 01:14:43,760

And if they're smart, they're going to therapy. But if they're not, that can be helped at home.

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And so I think a lot of marriages fail because there's a false sense of what it's going to be in the beginning.

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01:14:50,760 --> 01:14:54,760

And then they figure out what the reality of it is.

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You don't get help.

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01:14:57,760 --> 01:15:00,760
Absolutely.

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01:15:00,760 --> 01:15:06,760
My first marriage, I would put under the list of that one needed to end.

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There were there were some things going on that clearly exhibited that it wasn't a two way street.

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And so that one came to an end.

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But I had I think it's the perfect example. I had Chris Fields on the show who was Oklahoma firefighter.

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He responded to the bombing and he's the one that's holding the dead toddler in this tragically iconic picture that gets shared all the time,

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01:15:31,760 --> 01:15:36,760
especially on the anniversary, reminding Chris of that day over and over and over again.

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And he spiraled into addiction. He ended up having affairs.

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01:15:42,760 --> 01:15:47,760
And but Cheryl, his wife, was just all in.

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01:15:47,760 --> 01:15:54,760

And Chris took ownership and went down the mental health road. And obviously, this is someone that came on years before I did.

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01:15:54,760 --> 01:16:00,760

So even more less entrenched in the mental health conversation.

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01:16:00,760 --> 01:16:07,760

But he got therapy. They worked at it. And they're married to this day and madly in love to this day.

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01:16:07,760 --> 01:16:10,760

I mean, I had dinner with them not too long ago, you know, and you can just see it.

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So I think that's that's the thing. If two human beings, you know, I always say relationships are like food.

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01:16:17,760 --> 01:16:21,760

You know, some of them are honey. You know, the high school sweethearts that end up dying, holding hand to hand.

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01:16:21,760 --> 01:16:26,760

And then some are a tuna fish sandwich you got from the gas station. You know, they only last so long.

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01:16:26,760 --> 01:16:31,760

So if you're with that tuna fish sandwich, then it ends. OK, then, you know, again, you have a child or whatever it was.

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01:16:31,760 --> 01:16:37,760

You went into it thinking it was going to be the right one. It ended up not being. That's one conversation.

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01:16:37,760 --> 01:16:46,760

But if your first responder partner had done another job and that would have kept you in love.

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01:16:46,760 --> 01:16:50,760

That's the conversation that we're having is like this job.

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01:16:50,760 --> 01:16:53,760

And this is, again, why I'm so passionate about the work week.

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01:16:53,760 --> 01:16:59,760

If the job has skewed the person, if it's starting to miswire their brain, you know, in the way that they perceive things

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01:16:59,760 --> 01:17:06,760

and where they go to fill this void and the sheer sleep deprivation when they can't even think straight and their hair trigger.

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01:17:06,760 --> 01:17:11,760

You know, and the screaming of people in the car. That's a different conversation.

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01:17:11,760 --> 01:17:18,760

So this is why I think, you know, you bring in this advocacy of putting an environment where our first responders can thrive

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alongside with the hope message of two people that really love each other, trying to overcome this profession.

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I think that that is where we need to get to when it comes to first responder families.

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01:17:32,760 --> 01:17:41,760

Totally agree. Sure. Well, you mentioned about the first responder coming home or the firefighter coming home.

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01:17:41,760 --> 01:17:48,760

I had a guy on recently who is the CEO of Newcom. This is amazing app. You can get on your phone now.

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01:17:48,760 --> 01:18:00,760

It started off as being this this engineering or this technology was only available in NASA and NFL, you know, whatever kind of training rooms or whatever it was.

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01:18:00,760 --> 01:18:09,760

Smartphones progressed so well now that it's an app and it's you literally put on headphones and a sleep mask and there's a thing called power nap.

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01:18:09,760 --> 01:18:14,760

There's no one called rescue and some other ones and they down regulate your nervous system.

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01:18:14,760 --> 01:18:24,760

I think this is the perfect tool for a firefighter or cop or corrections officer or whoever dispatcher to take 20 minutes, find somewhere where they feel safe.

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01:18:24,760 --> 01:18:29,760

You know, if it's a cop, you might not want to do it in your control car on the side of the road in Oakland.

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01:18:29,760 --> 01:18:33,760

You know, and then do this 20 minute app and you literally feel like you've had a couple hours sleep.

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It's incredible. And it literally forces the brain to down regulate. It's the only technology that does this.

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So looking at the transition from X amount of days in the fire station to walking through the door, arguably maybe having just cut a child out of a car three hours prior.

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01:18:52,760 --> 01:18:59,760

What were your perceptions of those first minutes and hours that your husbands came through the door?

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01:18:59,760 --> 01:19:08,760

And then did you ever develop any tools or rituals or anything that made that transition better?

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01:19:08,760 --> 01:19:18,760

So I actually am very fortunate and while I don't know if I'm fortunate or not, but Cameron always had a pretty substantial drive home.

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01:19:18,760 --> 01:19:24,760

So there was an hour between going to work and coming home that he was driving.

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01:19:24,760 --> 01:19:30,760

So he always used that kind of as decompressant decompression time.

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01:19:30,760 --> 01:19:45,760

When there was a larger incident or critical incident, even with that hour drive time, he definitely came home different than when he left.

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So when Audra and I talk about this all the time, this is like one of our main things.

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We developed a buffer time, right?

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01:20:01,760 --> 01:20:08,760

Whatever that was for him. For mine, it's like 15, 20 minutes. He comes in the door. Nobody asks him any questions.

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01:20:08,760 --> 01:20:15,760

We say hello, do our things, right? Whatever, but he's allowed to just be.

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01:20:15,760 --> 01:20:26,760

And then we either sit down and have a meal or we have coffee together and he kind of just talked about his work week, so to speak.

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01:20:26,760 --> 01:20:35,760

That wasn't always the case, though. When we first got married, it was, how was your shift? What were you doing? What did you see? What did you do? All that stuff.

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01:20:35,760 --> 01:20:39,760

Or the kids were running to him and wanting to give him a big dad hugs and ask him all the questions.

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01:20:39,760 --> 01:20:45,760

And so that really didn't work very well. You can't be doing that.

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01:20:45,760 --> 01:21:01,760

So, yeah, the routine is decompression time, even though he's had decompression time already to acclimate back into the family, to integrate back in.

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And almost I call it a handoff. It's almost like when you hand the chart from your ambulance to the nurse, right?

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01:21:09,760 --> 01:21:15,760

You're giving them a download of what you've done on the ambulance.

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01:21:15,760 --> 01:21:19,760

So we give them a download of what's happened at home while they've been gone.

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And hopefully, if you're communicating throughout their shift, you've already kind of talked about things that have happened.

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01:21:25,760 --> 01:21:37,760

But maybe there are some things that you missed along the way or you didn't feel were significant. So you were able to just kind of keep that at home separate from work kind of thing.

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01:21:37,760 --> 01:21:46,760

And then, you know, they get 24 hours and they have to be dad. Like they don't get to come home and just be a couch potato.

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01:21:46,760 --> 01:21:56,760

They have to get involved in what the kids are doing and what mom's doing. And then we ultimately try to get a break as well an hour or two while they're off shift.

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01:21:56,760 --> 01:22:02,760

So and then maybe there's a date night or whatever mixed in there if there's time.

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01:22:02,760 --> 01:22:09,760

So that's kind of how we do it. But it wasn't always that way.

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01:22:09,760 --> 01:22:16,760

Well, what about you? So pretty much same as Chelsea when the kids were little was complete chaos.

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01:22:16,760 --> 01:22:24,760

But we also were totally oblivious to him needing the buffer, him needing the downtime.

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01:22:24,760 --> 01:22:31,760

I was completely clueless. I was like, why are you being a dick? Take this kid. I'm tired.

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01:22:31,760 --> 01:22:41,760

Now hindsight is much better. I mean, I think, you know, that's one of the reasons why we started our podcast, because we were like, here's all the things that we learned.

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01:22:41,760 --> 01:22:47,760

And hopefully we'll teach you some habits that should work now.

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And you can keep going throughout your life rather than hating your husband for like 10 years. OK.

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01:22:55,760 --> 01:23:05,760

So now it's great. I think maybe the past like six or seven years, we are really good about checking in.

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01:23:05,760 --> 01:23:11,760

We do, you know, we've got he's got his 45 minute drive home from work.

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01:23:11,760 --> 01:23:22,760

He gets his downtime and then we go for a walk and we decompress and then we just chat about everything that he's missed while he was gone.

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And he sometimes tells me about stuff that's happening, you know, at work.

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01:23:30,760 --> 01:23:33,760

He'll tell me about some scary calls every once in a while.

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But we have our rhythm down for sure now. I mean, it is.

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01:23:37,760 --> 01:23:52,760

I will say it is a lot easier for us to communicate now because the kids are older, because they don't need so much of our time, not time. They don't need our presence like

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01:23:52,760 --> 01:23:58,760

they don't need diapers changed every 10 minutes and bottles fed every hour.

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01:23:58,760 --> 01:24:03,760

So we have a lot more time to discuss stuff. I mean, our teenagers spend like half of their day in their room.

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01:24:03,760 --> 01:24:10,760

So we have to talk to each other. There's no one else to talk to. I'm talking to the wall on Zof days.

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So we've definitely learned a lot more about communication and what how our communication styles are with each other.

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I think it would be awesome if these kinds of discussions were had in the very beginning when these first responders start in their departments.

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01:24:33,760 --> 01:24:37,760

Like, here's how to talk to your spouse. Here's what to do.

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01:24:37,760 --> 01:24:46,760

You know, when you go home, how to decompress, like, here's some tips, those kinds of things, because I mean, we don't get a handbook.

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We've heard from a couple of departments that apparently they do give a handbook to the spouse, which is like mind blowing to me.

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But if you don't know, how are you supposed to like function, you know?

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01:25:03,760 --> 01:25:17,760

So it's a practice, but it's one that we are really hoping that we're teaching the younger spouses how to do it now rather than 10 years in when you're about to get divorced.

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You know, so. Yeah, it's it's a lot. It takes a lot of time.

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OK, hopefully we'll cut that time in half.

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So in short, the fire department is not what you think it is because Hollywood told you a lie.

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And it's a lot of work. That's it.

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I talk about this, even the expectations that I have been an absolute black cloud when it comes to cardiac arrest specifically.

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So it's 14 years in the empty and in the paramedic. I didn't have a single code save.

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That's that's a lot when you go to school and you're told if you do this algorithm and give these meds and defibrillate this way, then you get normal sinus.

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01:26:00,760 --> 01:26:04,760

And, you know, the patient then comes to the station two weeks later, gives you a cake and you're in the paper.

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01:26:04,760 --> 01:26:07,760

And then Hollywood, even someone pointed out is absolutely true.

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01:26:07,760 --> 01:26:14,760

Even when reality television follows firefighters and paramedics, they only ever show the saves.

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01:26:14,760 --> 01:26:24,760

And so the reality is I forget, it depends from place to place. But ironically, where I just worked the last five years of my career had the highest code save because they protect theme parks.

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01:26:24,760 --> 01:26:27,760

So there's AEDs and people everywhere.

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01:26:27,760 --> 01:26:39,760

Still zero. But, you know, this is the thing. If you set people up with this expectation, that's further they're going to fall when they realize it's not a reality.

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I had a paramedic recently. We were just a friend of mine were talking and I think one of the kids said something about, well, you save lives for a living.

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It must be great. And he was like, no, I don't save lives for a living. I sustain life for a living.

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Yeah. And that's really the truth of the matter. Right. Absolutely.

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I mean, I keep them alive long enough to get them to the hospital and the hospital does the work. Right.

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01:27:06,760 --> 01:27:11,760

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's, you know, there's a lot that we do when you're called pre-code.

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But yeah, I mean, again, television does a service and we're talking about before we hit record this book I'm writing now.

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My goal is to make it into a show and the modern protagonist is a firefighter and I want to tell the real story.

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You know, it's not going to be all doom and gloom. I've got to show the fun and the firehouse and these other things, but it's going to be raw.

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01:27:30,760 --> 01:27:37,760

And people are going to be like, what? This is like you said, that when they don't all models, why?

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01:27:37,760 --> 01:27:41,760

You know, why are they not all got six pack abs and, you know, bronze skin?

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01:27:41,760 --> 01:27:47,760

Because this is a real fire service and this is the impact on the family and that needs to be told, you know,

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01:27:47,760 --> 01:27:51,760

and the sacrifice that the men and women in uniform and their families make.

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So I'm hoping that I can write a story that will get on the screen that will finally tell the real story.

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You know, it's not all doom and gloom. It's an amazing profession that if I didn't care about, I wouldn't be doing it.

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01:28:04,760 --> 01:28:07,760

I've been out in uniform for five years and I'm still doing this.

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But yeah, we need to tell the right story, you know, the same way Banda Brothers told the proper story about World War Two.

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Yep. Yeah. I mean, and like you said, it is great.

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It's not all bad. There's just a lot of.

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01:28:24,760 --> 01:28:36,760

Stuff that makes it not fun, but I mean, we're still incredibly lucky to have our husbands be in this line of service.

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It's just it comes with a lot of things that people don't understand and people are not aware of.

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01:28:41,760 --> 01:28:44,760

It's and it's fixable. This is the thing.

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Funerals that initiated this podcast, the names that I have written on my back when I do the hero challenge that they have here in Orange County every year.

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Almost all of those should still be walking around today.

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01:28:57,760 --> 01:29:02,760

That's the thing that makes me so angry. So this is why these these conversations are important.

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01:29:02,760 --> 01:29:06,760

I want to hit one more topic and then get to your podcast.

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The last place I worked at, I saw a lot less trauma.

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01:29:11,760 --> 01:29:20,760

It protected a theme park, you know, a lot of the stuff was definitely the most nine one one abuse I've ever seen in any any place because they let Disney.

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01:29:20,760 --> 01:29:26,760

I mean, they let that theme park have free rein on just calling them for everything.

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Deliver a bandaid, you know, whatever. And it was, you know, it was ridiculous.

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01:29:30,760 --> 01:29:33,760

But you didn't see as much you saw.

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01:29:33,760 --> 01:29:42,760

There was still a lot behind scenes people don't know about, but it wasn't like working in the rough neighborhoods I worked prior to that in the streets of Anaheim, Orlando.

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But where I think another less discussed element of stress and trauma and then the ripple effects going into the families that I saw in that last place was organizational stress, organizational betrayal.

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You have these men and women in uniform that want to be great firefighters, great paramedics.

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And they're working in some of these departments where there are fragile egos with bugles that are literally creating an environment of stress that has no reason to even be there.

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Just through, like I said, fragile ego, job justification, whatever it is.

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So what is your lens, if any, on the environment and the impact on your husband?

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I think Chelsea already talked about hers a little bit.

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Her husband just laughed.

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Environmental, or we call it, and I can't even be just administrative betrayal at this point.

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It's the, I think, more toxic than cancer in some way.

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It's the experience that I have had listening to it and being, you know, very small part of it.

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01:31:23,760 --> 01:31:27,760

It's mind blowing.

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01:31:27,760 --> 01:31:31,760

And it comes down from all levels. It starts at the city.

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01:31:31,760 --> 01:31:42,760

It goes down to the fire admin. It trickles into each station and creates just this atomic bomb of chaos.

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01:31:42,760 --> 01:31:48,760

And there are definitely some that attribute to it more.

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But it literally spreads like wildfire and it becomes so mentally exhausting for everyone in the department.

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I mean, I think that is one of the reasons why we are seeing a mass exodus right now.

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Because I just think there is, people just can't deal with that anymore.

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I mean, I can barely deal with hearing about it and knowing that my husband has to deal with it every day is, no thank you.

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I would quit too, you know. It's not an environment that I would want to put myself in.

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And I think it's causing a lot of people to question why they're there still and how to get out.

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It's just unfortunate. There's so many layers to it.

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It even comes down to civilians sometimes complaining about firefighters being overpaid.

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01:33:07,760 --> 01:33:11,760

And then cities agreeing with that sentiment.

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01:33:11,760 --> 01:33:16,760

And cities trying to cut their benefits and take away their medical.

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01:33:16,760 --> 01:33:25,760

And doing these salary surveys, convinced that they're paying them too much so they don't have to give them a raise.

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It's the state cutting funding when they actually need to increase the funding.

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It's the hand crews that are no longer available.

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The trickle down effect is enormous.

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And it's definitely not contained in our department, in our state. It's nationwide.

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It's catastrophic, for sure.

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01:33:52,760 --> 01:33:56,760

Chelsea, anything to add?

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01:33:56,760 --> 01:34:04,760

I think it starts with the false economy, personally.

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01:34:04,760 --> 01:34:11,760

And I think Roger's right. It trickles down from there.

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01:34:11,760 --> 01:34:15,760

And the false reality of what the job actually entails and all the things.

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I think you have a lot of higher-ups that don't really understand a lot of what the job is.

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01:34:23,760 --> 01:34:28,760

And may have never done the job themselves.

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My question is, how does a city councilman decide how much to pay a firefighter when they've never done the job?

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Or how many hours a firefighter should work if they've never done the job?

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01:34:40,760 --> 01:34:44,760

And they go to bed at 5 o'clock every day.

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01:34:44,760 --> 01:34:48,760

Exactly.

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Yeah, there was someone, I can't remember who we were talking to recently, Chelsea, that said, as soon as HR got involved, it all went downhill.

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I think that was Damien.

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01:35:00,760 --> 01:35:02,760

I think it was.

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Okay, that sounds like something you would say, actually.

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01:35:05,760 --> 01:35:18,760

That's true. I mean, 20 years ago when Damien got hired and even Cam, there wasn't this penetration of all these.

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Patriarchy.

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01:35:19,760 --> 01:35:23,760

Yeah, it was just like this fire chief decided these guys were the greatest.

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Let me pick three captains from the department to hire somebody for our department.

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01:35:29,760 --> 01:35:43,760

Now, let me bring this outsider in that's never met anybody in the department and is supposed to know what their environment is like and pick someone to throw in and hire all of these recruits.

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01:35:43,760 --> 01:35:46,760

And it's like, wait a minute, you don't know a thing about this place.

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01:35:46,760 --> 01:35:51,760

You've never stepped foot into a station. You don't know what these crews are like.

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01:35:51,760 --> 01:35:56,760

And now they have to answer to HR. They have to follow all these rules.

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01:35:56,760 --> 01:35:59,760

They have to do all of these.

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01:35:59,760 --> 01:36:08,760

Like, I mean, in my opinion, it's nonsense. The crap that they have to do now to hire people or it's like, it doesn't make sense to me.

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01:36:08,760 --> 01:36:16,760

It's just causing so much just chaos and unnecessary just nonsense. It's just the most bizarre thing.

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01:36:16,760 --> 01:36:20,760

I mean, I could go off for a long time about it. It drives me nuts.

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01:36:20,760 --> 01:36:28,760

But it's just creating like just stuff that doesn't need to be there. I feel like I don't know.

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01:36:28,760 --> 01:36:45,760

Yeah. I mean, the perfect example, the last place I worked at the every single position above battalion chief had never even been a firefighter before all the way up to operations chief and fire chief operations chief came through dispatch fire chief came through fire prevention.

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So and we talked about dispatch dispatch is an imperative tool, but they don't know anything about what you do in a fire station.

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You know, very, very little. So if you do, as I say, not as I do mentality, of course, it's going to create undue stress.

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So, you know, and again, these are all solvable problems.

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And imagine imagine the impact if you put the bar back up where it needs to be.

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01:37:09,760 --> 01:37:11,760

You gave people the rest and recovery that you need.

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01:37:11,760 --> 01:37:17,760

You fully staffed your department, all of which are absolutely possible. And it's funny because people say, well, how are we supposed to hire now?

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01:37:17,760 --> 01:37:21,760

You know, we don't we can barely get enough people now. How are we supposed to hire an extra shift?

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01:37:21,760 --> 01:37:31,760

Well, you fix the things that people think are shit. And then they'll line up outside your station again, which is happening in a department sort of advertise this new shift schedule, the ones that are brave enough to actually do it.

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01:37:31,760 --> 01:37:48,760

So that's how you fix it. Because, you know, 20 years ago, we were competing against thousands and thousands of people. And now we're scooping up almost everyone that applies, which is the great firefighters and also the really shitty ones that down the road are going to cause you a fuckload of problems.

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And one day probably become chief as well. You should go hand in hand.

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01:37:52,760 --> 01:38:02,760

So, you know, do you want to fix it now? Or they're already chief and there's already a fuckload of problems. Yep. Yeah.

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01:38:02,760 --> 01:38:15,760

All right. Well, let's get to another solution. So talk to me about, you know, COVID through your eyes and then what made you decide that, excuse me, what made you create the Dear Chiefs podcast?

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Oh, no, we decided you were right. We just decided one day.

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So Audra decided one day and then we pressed record. Yeah, pretty much.

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01:38:26,760 --> 01:38:50,760

I mean, we started it during COVID. We had been talking on Instagram for, I don't know, maybe a year before. And we were both experiencing the same shit. And we had both learned so much about not just the fire service, just about how to function as a family of a first responder.

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We were like, let's just share this with the world and see what happens. And I mean, that's how Dear Chiefs came to be. It's just like, you know, our goal is really to help first responder families

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01:39:06,760 --> 01:39:17,760

figure out how to live together and how to make their marriages stronger, their relationships better, you know, time with their kids, more valuable, all of those things.

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So it's a lot of fun. It's a lot of work, but it's a lot of fun.

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What do you think, Jules?

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I think you left out the part where we were supposed to go to a conference and it got canceled because of the pandemic starting off. And we were looking around the internet to try to see if there was anything being offered virtually.

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And the only thing we could find was a CPR class for first responder families. And it was like, what the heck does CPR have to do with being married to a first responder?

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How is that actually going to help my marriage? And both of us thought that was absolute crazy sauce. Like, this is the only thing people could come up with for a conference for spouses, how to do CPR.

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Like, what is that? So we collectively decided that we need to do something. And I was not, she's like, oh, you're a great writer. We should write a blog.

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I'm like, I don't have time to write a blog. Like, are you serious? We've got kids in our house. Like, we're trying to do school at home. Like, they're not, I'm not blogging.

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She's like, well, what about a podcast? Yeah, I could probably talk for an hour a week or something like that. And she goes, okay, how about tomorrow?

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Yeah, I guess we're doing it tomorrow.

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Hey, it worked out. Okay, what can I say?

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We started podcasts before they were cool. I don't, I don't know.

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01:41:00,760 --> 01:41:03,760

Otherwise, I agree with Audra's story.

971

01:41:03,760 --> 01:41:15,760

Yeah, I totally forgot about that. I always forget about that. But yeah, it's really been an experience to be honest with you. I don't think we ever thought it was going to be as big as it is.

972

01:41:15,760 --> 01:41:26,760

And it's really cool to hear other spouses' stories and to hear other departments work across the country.

973

01:41:26,760 --> 01:41:40,760

And it's especially good for me when we get those DMs that say, thank you so much. I wish this was here 10 years ago.

974

01:41:40,760 --> 01:41:52,760

Because I mean, I think there's a huge need for it. And we are very privileged to be able to fulfill that need for as many people as we can.

975

01:41:52,760 --> 01:41:57,760

Absolutely. I've always said if it helps one person, then it was worth it.

976

01:41:57,760 --> 01:42:04,760

But I gotta say that CPR for marriages, breathe some life into your marriage would be a great title for that.

977

01:42:04,760 --> 01:42:09,760

That's the next worst title. That's not what it was for.

978

01:42:09,760 --> 01:42:19,760

I think that was good. It was to teach the wives or the spouse at home how to give CPR to their children if there was an emergency.

979

01:42:19,760 --> 01:42:23,760

The intent was good. It was just the execution was just...

980

01:42:23,760 --> 01:42:28,760

There's more responsibility for you while your spouse is away. Cool. Sign me up for that class.

981

01:42:28,760 --> 01:42:32,760

Forget all the other things that go on, you know?

982

01:42:32,760 --> 01:42:37,760

Did they give you a mannequin? Did they ship a mannequin or something? Or were you just kind of doing it into the air?

983

01:42:37,760 --> 01:42:41,760

Oh my God. We thought it was so ridiculous.

984

01:42:41,760 --> 01:42:46,760

Use real children.

985

01:42:46,760 --> 01:42:51,760

This course is shit.

986

01:42:51,760 --> 01:42:53,760

They're still breathing. It's fine.

987

01:42:53,760 --> 01:43:01,760

It's like the one slide in the whole Academy for mental health and firefighters, right? Like the one slide talk.

988

01:43:01,760 --> 01:43:04,760

Yeah. Yeah. Well, that's that's the sad thing, though.

989

01:43:04,760 --> 01:43:10,760

Yeah. If you think about it, who do you want talking about that chapter?

990

01:43:10,760 --> 01:43:14,760

You want someone who understands. Same as Alex Jaber is amazing.

991

01:43:14,760 --> 01:43:16,760

Amazing person. You should get on her on your podcast, too.

992

01:43:16,760 --> 01:43:25,760

But she's a paramedic, but she got really into just the death notification and the mental health impact as well.

993

01:43:25,760 --> 01:43:29,760

But, you know, who do you want teaching you about death notifications?

994

01:43:29,760 --> 01:43:36,760

Someone who understands what we're actually supposed to do, like the wording and the impact on the family and all these things?

995

01:43:36,760 --> 01:43:41,760

Or, you know, the retired salty guy that's just kind of sifting through chapter to chapter.

996

01:43:41,760 --> 01:43:44,760

You know, it's now we're looking at a slightly different.

997

01:43:44,760 --> 01:43:52,760

You know, you will probably want someone who's being courageously vulnerable with their own mental health to be teaching you the mental health chapter.

998

01:43:52,760 --> 01:43:54,760

Yep. Totally.

999

01:43:54,760 --> 01:43:57,760

All right. Well, we have been chatting for over an hour and a half.

1000

01:43:57,760 --> 01:44:03,760

I want to be mindful of your time. So before I let you go and before we talk about where people can find you guys in the podcast,

1001

01:44:03,760 --> 01:44:09,760

is there any other wisdom that you want to impart before we wrap this up?

1002

01:44:09,760 --> 01:44:14,760

I don't think so. We pretty much covered everything. I mean.

1003

01:44:14,760 --> 01:44:17,760

Yeah, no, I got nothing.

1004

01:44:17,760 --> 01:44:21,760

Chelsea's taken ahead to tumbleweeds. OK.

1005

01:44:21,760 --> 01:44:23,760

We've talked it all out. OK.

1006

01:44:23,760 --> 01:44:26,760

Good. That means we did the job properly then. Perfect.

1007

01:44:26,760 --> 01:44:35,760

All right. Well, then firstly, where can people find the podcast and then where can find where can they find you guys on social media individually?

1008

01:44:35,760 --> 01:44:37,760

We're on Instagram.

1009

01:44:37,760 --> 01:44:41,760

Dude at Dear Chiefs podcast.

1010

01:44:41,760 --> 01:44:46,760

Yes. And we have our website, dearchiefs.com.

1011

01:44:46,760 --> 01:44:51,760

And all of our podcasts are on pretty much any streaming service at this point.

1012

01:44:51,760 --> 01:44:56,760

Apple, Spotify, I think Amazon straight off of our website.

1013

01:44:56,760 --> 01:45:02,760

Anywhere you listening, listen to podcasts, you can you can find our podcast, Dear Chiefs podcast.

1014

01:45:02,760 --> 01:45:06,760

And yeah, that's it.

1015

01:45:06,760 --> 01:45:09,760

Beautiful. Well, I just want to say thank you so much.

1016

01:45:09,760 --> 01:45:14,760

It's been such an interesting perspective. I've had, you know, some fire spouses on here.

1017

01:45:14,760 --> 01:45:19,760

Sadly, some of them are fire widows, not spouses now because of the very things that we discussed.

1018

01:45:19,760 --> 01:45:22,760

But it's been such an important conversation.

1019

01:45:22,760 --> 01:45:31,760

So I want to thank you so much not only for coming on the show today, but stepping up and starting your podcast and being part of the solution as well.

1020

01:45:31,760 --> 01:45:38,760

Thank you. We are very lucky to be on your show because we we adore you.

1021

01:45:38,760 --> 01:45:50,760

So thank you for having us.