

Cole Lyle - Episode 811

Mon, Sep 04, 2023 4:36PM 2:03:43

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

people, veterans, afghanistan, dog, military, feel, point, worked, va, talk, give, day, serve, love, war, service, texas a&m, experience, mental health, weeks

SPEAKERS

James Geering, Cole Lyle

J James Geering 00:00

Welcome to the behind the shield podcast. As always, my name is James Geering. And this week, it is my absolute honor to welcome on the show, marine member of the mission rollcall team, and the founder of kayas. canines, Cole Lyle. So in this conversation, we discuss a host of topics from his own journey into the military, his powerful mental health story, how a service dog changed his life, fighting for holistic treatments to become available for veteran mental health, the viral video of his own canine Kaya, unique challenges in tribal and rural areas, and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredibly powerful conversation, as I say, every week, please just take a moment, go to whichever app you listen to this on, subscribe to the show, leave feedback and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of over 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men and women's stories so I can get them to every single person on planet earth who needs to hear them. So with that being said, I introduce to you Cole Lyle enjoy Well, Cole, I want to start by saying thank you so much for taking the time and coming on the behind the shield podcast today.

C Cole Lyle 01:46

Absolutely, James, thanks for having me.

J James Geering 01:48

So where on planet earth we find that you this afternoon?

C Cole Lyle 01:51

Well, right now I am in Bedford, New York. I actually, earlier this morning, I had a 530 flight from Westchester or not, excuse me, Syracuse, New York. But there's no direct flight from there to hear. So I had to take a flight from Syracuse to DC, and then all the way back up to me. So

my day started at 330 When my alarm went off for that 530 flight. And you know, I finally landed here and just, you know, getting ready for the weekend spending some time with family.

J

James Geering 02:29

Yeah, I've had those didn't buy them. But I've had those tickets before. Like, I'm trying to go to California like yeah, we just go from Florida to New York, and then down to Delaware and then to Wisconsin and just go straight lines accounted for isn't that the cheaper? But yeah, well,

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02:44

I mean, I always when booking flights, I always when I'm booking I'm like, oh, I'll just take the really early one, because they're normally less expensive. You never are delayed or canceled, because you know, it's the earliest flight in the day. So there's not a reverberation of cancellations and things like that. And then when you get to your destination, you've got the whole day, usually. So I'm like, Oh, this is a great idea. I'll just I'll book the early one. And then of course, the alarm goes off at 330 or 430. In the morning, you're like why do I do this to myself every time. But then, you know, it's a vicious cycle. You just keep doing it.

J

James Geering 03:18

Yeah, when when we ended up having flights that are just you can't get around it early. We'll always book of hotel at the airport. Because I tell my wife, I just don't want to roll out of bed and then drive 90 minutes just to get to the airport. So yeah, I value my sleep too much.

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Absolutely. Yeah. Luckily this morning, the hotel was only it wasn't at the airport, but it's small. Syracuse isn't huge. And it was maybe 10 minutes away. So it wasn't that bad. Beautiful.

J

James Geering 03:48

All right, well, then, I know, you know, obviously, it's got lots of things we're going to talk about when it comes to the nonprofit but I want to start at the very beginning of your story. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic. what your parents did, how many siblings?

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04:01

Yeah, I was born in Corsicana, Texas, actually, not even in Corsicana. It was outside of Corsicana. Between on a ranch between two small towns, burying them house population like 100 outside of city limits, and mom, my dad, you know, obviously my dad was a rancher still is.



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And my mom, you know, did you know? I honestly don't know what she did when I was that young. But



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my mom and dad got divorced when I was three. So I spent a lot of time with my mom and I have two older sisters. So I was I was swimming in the estrogen ocean have two older sisters and my mom and even my dog and my cat were female. So I was just I was outnumbered. But yeah, they got divorced when I was three. And so I spent most Have my young years with my mom and spend some time with my dad on, you know, weekends and summers and things like that. I grew up in Dallas Fort Worth area with my mom. So I'd spend school years there and then go do summers with my dad. Yeah, it was it was Texas as I love Texas. I miss it. Hopefully one day I'll live there again. But yeah, it was I would say it was kind of a strange childhood, just because as the only boy and young boy, I hit my, you know, my mom, she loved her to death, but she didn't know how to be a dad as well. And my dad, at the time, tried to spend some time with him. But he was a little disconnected. We have a good relationship now. But we had a pretty rocky one grown up. And then graduated high school and joined the Marine Corps.



James Geering 05:58

So working on a ranch, I grew up on a farm but my dad was a horse of a veterinarian. So it wasn't agriculture so much it was there was ducks and sheep and stuff. But mainly it was horses that were being treated. But it was a lot of manual labor a lot of long days. Talk to me about ranch life compared to you know, some of the the experiences that you have with your mother.



06:19

I mean, vastly different. I mean, my mom lived in smack dab in the middle right next to DFW airport, and between Dallas and Fort Worth, and it was a very, you know, urban kind of, I mean, I wasn't in the Heart of Dallas or anything. So I wasn't living in the city in the city, but it was very suburban area suburban life. My dad on the other hand, it was your you feel at the time, like you're in the middle of nowhere. And as you as you mentioned, a lot of manual labor, a lot of early mornings, a lot of late nights, in hindsight, got a lot of good experiences out of it, I feel like compared to my peers, I have more mechanical skills and practical skills. And it was it was you want to build a young boys character have them, you know, toss around 50 pound bales of hay in 110 degree heat. That might do it to you. So yeah, just extremely different. Luckily, my mom was pretty self aware. So when I was a teenager, I put me in a lot of organizations with positive male influences. I was a boy scout and ultimately got my Eagle Scout spent a lot of time with, with my troop, and had a lot of good young male mentors and was in football and had a lot of strong Christian male influences in coaches and so vastly different. But I think I've benefited from being in both worlds. I mean, certainly it wasn't great growing up in a broken

home and as a young boy, being the only male in the, in the nuclear family environment. And there are, there were challenges there. And I feel like obviously, some of that still reverberates into into who I am today. But yeah, just completely different.

J

James Geering 08:27

So one of the things that seems to come up over and over again, it might be early in someone's life, if they didn't struggle, maybe when they were in the uniform or a lot of times it's you know, it's later, but you have an absence of role models doesn't mean that the mother and father aren't there, but there's still a void whether it's, you know, true masculinity, meaning kind of compassionate and strong, or whether it's something else. When it comes to scouting, obviously, it got a black eye when it came to some of the sexual abuse, which you know, me as a parent, you know, can make me a little bit cautious. But that being said, I've got friends that are eagle scouts that are you know, phenomenal people that swear by my scouting so talk to me about that your your role when you were first in it, and then the leadership role.

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I would be firmly in the latter category. I have nothing but good things to say about the experience itself. All my scout masters were I mean, I never experienced anything close to the allegations that came out. And I frankly was was pretty shocked because our troop you know, again, in hindsight, you know, you were as a as a young boy never alone with another adult. It was always you were in group activities. So there was never even the opportunity for any of that. But as again, as somebody that grew up with two older sisters and my mom, I always relished and look forward to the time that I got to go on camp outs for the weekend or summer camps for a week and a half and just be around a bunch to young men and men. It was it was great for me and growing up on the ranch, like I had some of the basic skills like some of the merit badges were fairly easy to me like horsemanship and but it broadened my horizons, and did some, I got to explore some topics that I probably otherwise would not have been exposed to in school that I still have interests in and hobbies and today, so I really enjoyed it. I think it helped me a lot. Number one and informing my decision that I wanted to serve in the military because it was a very service oriented organization. Obviously my Eagle Scout project, but then I went to Philmont twice, which was a high adventure Boy Scout camp, where you the minimum age I think, is 13 or 14. At the time, I had to get a waiver because I begged my Scoutmaster to be able to go younger than I was supposed to be allowed to. But it was they take you out into New Mexico. And this massive ranch that wait Phillips donated to the Boy Scouts of America. And you go out for about 10 days to 14 days. And just backpack in the back country. And you have you know dehydrated food and some of the camps that you go to have themed things. But the first year I went, I was the youngest person there. The second time I was a crew leader, because I had experience at Philmont. And I went with some of my my peers, the first time I was going on with like older scouts that were above me and rank and everything. Second time it was my peers and below and I'd already had Philmont experience and none of them had, it really gave me an opportunity to learn more and develop leadership skills. But even at Philmont you know, one of the requirements when you go is doing a conservation project for the back country itself. So for instance, one year there was a fire that burned a lot of the north part of Philmont. So they had us take 50 pound bales of hay and go spread hay to promote new growth. And so things like that I just I always had a heart for doing those kinds of service

projects. I always volunteered to help other people with their Eagle Scout projects. And I think between the leadership aspect and the service aspect I think those were pretty strong drivers to make me want to serve military.

J James Geering 12:43

My son ended up finding the JROTC program in his high school he's still doing at the moment. And it was the same kind of thing that the respect the service, the the uniformity, the rank structure. But then last year, they went to I think was called JCLC, like the leadership camp, but it was again, it wasn't quite a full week, I think it was like five and a half days, but it was all the high ropes and you know, app sailing and all these things, that confidence building team building, and it was phenomenal. And he came back exhausted, but so pumped up. So I kind of got a slightly different view of the scouting world, just from a different lens in the end. Yeah. Well, and,

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and to your point about rank structure, and one of the things I hated about school growing up is I never felt challenged. Right. And that sounds I don't, I don't mean to make it sound like I was like, a genius trapped in public school or anything like that. But it was just all regurgitation. You know, and it wasn't, I didn't feel challenged and the public school system is objectively slanted for for young girls anyways, because most of the teachers are are females. When you get up to, you know, sixth to sixth grade right in, at least in Texas, there was it's not like there's recess anymore. I know of all boys schools were the first thing you do, even in younger grades is go to PE or go outside and they run the boys, you know, because boys just have a lot of that energy. And if you don't get it out of them, then they they act up in class, they talk they they just they're I hate to saying boys will be boys, but like, there are natural things that they do. And so I felt like scouting gave me the opportunity through merit badges through the rank structure, because you had requirements that you had to complete before you were even eligible for the next rank. It gave me like a structured and like things to actually challenge myself to do and get out of my comfort zone. So I really enjoyed that. That aspect of it too.

J James Geering 14:47

There's a documentary I talk about a lot. It's called the motivation factor and it was a P program in the 60s. And they had like a martial arts belt system, but it was shorts. So the kids actually would work as a team. And you know, they would every, I forget how many it was every couple of weeks or so they would get to challenge the tests. And if they passed all the things where you went from, you know, white shorts to blue shorts to ratios to gold shorts, whatever the progression was, the last one was phenomenal. I mean, these were Uber athletes by the time but encouraged that teamwork, it almost eliminated bullying, gave self esteem. But again, it gave them a thing, you know, you go to pee, and you run up and down and put a parachute in the air or kick a ball around, you know, games are fun, and they need to be there. But that sense of achievement, a sense of progression, the exploration of the miracle that is a human body. This was such a beautiful program, and it was, you know, it was taken down. And there was one school that tried to do it, and COVID, you know, murdered that in the end. But

yeah, I think this is the thing that kids want that progression. They want that purpose, and they want that their journey. And sitting down memorizing the States of America doesn't take you on a journey.

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Yeah, yeah. And a lot of I think one of my biggest issues with school was also I love I did a little exchange program at Oxford at one point, and they, the way they teach right is you have one meeting a week with a tutor in your class, and at the end of the year, you have one exam, and it's pass fail. And if you don't study and you don't do the work, and it's not on you, you're gonna fail the exam.

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Teaches responsibility, obviously, you're talking about two different levels of pee, I mean, Oxford, older and whatever, but I just studying throughout the year and learning a regurgitation of facts,

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or I guess what I'm trying to say is, if you get all A's, but you fail one class, what's the thing that they're most likely to focus on the failure, the failure, right, instead of fostering what kids are naturally good at, because of standardized testing, and because they have requirements and quotas for graduation, and things like that, for federal funding for state funding, we tend to focus not on fostering the kids natural ability, but on trying to make sure that they're, they're hitting minimum standards, or, you know, state tests and things like that. So I just, I never really felt challenged. And I was self aware enough to know that if I went to college, straight out of high school that I probably, I was still kind of a, I needed a kick in the pants after high school. And I wouldn't take it seriously. And I worried that I wouldn't be challenged there either. So the military was a great option for me, my mom, obviously, she said, When I turned 18, you're either getting a job going to school or joining the military, but you're not staying in my house. So you know, I didn't want to do what my sisters did, which is go to college, take out student loans, and still work two jobs during college to try to not take out more student loans. So the military was great option because the GI Bill, it would give me experience I joined and was a diesel mechanic. And I purposely picked that so that if I got out of the military, I liked it. And I still didn't want to go to school, I had a skill I had a trade that I could go and work on Mack Trucks or work on Caterpillar, power packs, things like that. So it was just a great option for me kind of all around, notwithstanding the fact that I just wanted to serve and and the Marine Corps. I didn't have any I was the first person in my family since my grandparents who served in World War Two to serve in the military. So I didn't have any like family guidance on which branch to serve and my now brother in law, but then my sister's boyfriend was a Marine he was in Volusia and oh four. And I really respected him and admired him. And he gave me some guidance. He actually tried to talk me out of it. He said you you know you should. You're smart enough. You should go to school and be an officer if it's really something you wanted to do. But I again, I just didn't. I didn't want to go that route. So that's why I ended up ultimately joining the Marine Corps over the Army or the Navy.

 James Geering 19:38

So you were deployed to Afghanistan. Have I got that right?

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Yeah. 2011 So I was with the Second Marine logistics group got actually activated from a reserve unit and in 2010, deployed with second emoji in 2011 from I think February to November. The exact dates I think it might have been late October, early November ish timeframe, but I was in Helmand Province, and it was part of then President Obama's plan to surge troops in the south and take control of Helmand province with, which ultimately kind of proved to be a fool's errand. But yeah, so it was there. Got OJT when I was in Afghanistan as a record operator, which is just a fancy term for a military tow truck. So obviously, things got blown up all the time. So they would need people to go out and tow up the vehicles to bring them back to base or you'd already have a wrecker in the convoy, because, again, something probably was gonna get blown up, so that you could just do it right there. But then, when our replacements came over and started taking over operational capabilities, I volunteered a lot of my time at the Bastion trauma center that was connected to camp Leatherneck, which was the main place that I spent time and and the USO, actually on that base. So wasn't getting a lot of sleep still. But yeah, I just felt like I needed to contribute more. And that seemed like a great way to do it. I also at the time was thinking because my mom had a career in health care. And I was thinking about getting out and trying to pursue becoming like an EMT, or a paramedic or something. And I figured that would be a pretty good way to get a little bit of experience and figure out whether it was something I really wanted to pursue or not.

 James Geering 21:48

With the tow truck driver, the wrecker I think one of the least acknowledges, acknowledged professions that see a horrendous amount of trauma are the records on the freeways, especially as a first responder, we'll go there, you know, sometimes we'll be able to cut the person out. Sometimes you won't. Sometimes the the the law enforcement side, once it left as it is, if it's, you know, some sort of homicide or law was broken that's related to it. And you'll see sometimes a wreck of a flatbed will have a car or there'll be a blue tarp over it. It's probably a body inside. Did you ever have any situations where you were kind of exposed to that element?

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Yeah, I mean, to be clear, I didn't I got OJT because, you know, they, they needed help. But I didn't I didn't do that, like a massive amount of times it was it was maybe, maybe, maybe between five and 10 times it was not a lot. And I never had a situation where we would go and recover a vehicle. And there was like a limb in it. I will say that as a mechanic that was on the base, when the records would bring them back. Sometimes you would be working on an AMRAP that just got absolutely blown to shed and it just absolutely mangled. And you would find, you know, a finger or hand or something like that, when you started ripping off all the mangled pieces, and then you'd go inside and you'd find you know, like I said, a toe or something like that, because the blast had just taken somebody's leg off. And before they they brought it to

us, they would always try to recover body parts and things like that. If if the service member was ke just so that they could, you know, for dignified transfer of remains and things like that, but never, never anything. Like what you're describing.

 James Geering 23:49

Well, I want to ask you a question that I asked everyone who was deployed to a combat zone and the reason behind this is very simple. The average civilian especially here in America gets a very polarized view of war got get still I mean, you know, the soap opera that is Ukraine war for example, you know, there's a whole script to what's being told. And I mean that in a positive way there's two groups of young men that are murdering each other because of two tyrants. But you either get a very pro war kill them all that God sought them out very anti war, they're all baby killers. And then in the middle are the men and women arguably children that we send overseas to fight with our our flag on their shoulder. So it's two part question the first part regardless of the politics that sent you in this case to Afghanistan, Were there moments or things that you witnessed that realize okay, there are some atrocities being you know, performed there are some bad people that we need to take care of

 24:48

you just like on on either side.

 James Geering 24:50

Yeah, I mean, you can be exactly either side but I mean, you know, the basically the other side will be the good the good side, the kindness but I mean, the horrors of war, basically.

 24:59

Yeah. When I was at Bastion there was a really been still to this day bothers me. I saw a lot of like kids and women that that were brought into the trauma center, like local nationals that were just collateral damage. And there was one kid in particular, and you know, it, he had a gunshot wound that he was unlikely to survive, like he had just bled too much before he even got to the hospital. So there was nothing that they could do. And he was, you know, shaking and scared and losing a lot of blood and didn't actually have anybody there. And I was just a volunteer, I wasn't a surgeon or anything, but I was trying to keep them calm, and I was holding his hands and he had a, I still have it, I don't have it with me, otherwise, I'd show you but like this, I don't to this day, I don't know if it's fake or not. But this little Zippo lighter that had, like the Marine Corps emblem on it. So I'm pretty sure like some marine in an effort to win hearts and minds or something, just gave it to him. But he was like, holding on to that. And I was holding his hand and I felt the life go out of them. And it really got to me, it took me years of doing therapy to realize why this affected me so much. But you know, I realized that it was because meet me as a young boy, sometimes, because unless I was in a scout trip or something like that, you know, I oftentimes felt alone. And, and it broke my heart that this kid was sitting there really alone with no family like I was there. In his in his most vulnerable, difficult moment. So, you know, I never saw I feel like the question you asked was alluding to,

did you ever see, like kind of war crime kind of stuff? I mean, I forget who said it, but somebody said all wars crime. And and that was something that that really got to me often was seeing, you know, young kids who had no dog in our fight, be injured or, or killed?

J James Geering 27:21

Well, I mean, I'm sorry to dig up that memory. But I think it's important for people to hear this perspective, because we've all seen the recruiting videos, and they make more seem like super fun jet skis and big guns and high fives.

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Yeah, you know, I think it's it's not necessarily just the just the recruiters and frankly, the the recruiting ads that I see. I've never seen one that just blew me away is like glorifying war. But, but I will say I think more than than the services and the recruiters the reason why people have such a polarized view of the military being like what you said, you know, they're all either veterans are all broken and dysfunctional, or, you know, their their special operations Door Kickers doing, you know, rappelling out of helicopters, and is because of the media that gets put out from like Hollywood, Netflix, just aren't just all these movies that that portray a a it's funny because there's, you know, hurry up and wait is a common refrain in the military. It's like, half of my time in Afghanistan was probably spent doing boring, mundane stuff that never goes into movies and, you know, never, never gets glorified in that sort of way. And frankly, a massive portion of the military never even deployed to a combat zone and usually stays like stateside. And so I feel like it's pop culture and that is a disconnect because military service is becoming a family business you have 80% of people that served have an immediate family member that served and less than 1% serve on active duty in the United States military. So mission rollcall actually did a poll last year of Americans represented representative of the American population and found that 67% of Gen Z, the youngest generation, the the WHO recruiters are trying to recruit now have nobody in their family or friend group that was a veteran or somebody on currently active duty. So there's a huge disconnect because they don't have these conversations with veterans about what it was really like. And all they see is the Hollywood you know portrayals of have that so they they're like, Oh, you're just going to war for oil and you're just killing babies or, you know they have this romanticized thing like lone survivor or top gun or that I wouldn't say, in any way glorifies war, but it's more high speed, right. And it shows the Special Operations thing, which is maybe less than 5% of what the military actually does. So, yeah. Yeah, sorry, that was long winded.

J James Geering 30:33

No, but it was beautiful. This is why I asked these questions, you know, and I think this just to kind of lay around, it's not an anti recruitment, video conversation. It's a cautionary tale for parents, especially if you're going to allow your child to go fight. You sure a shit better make sure you know, it's the reason. And it's a justified reason. So I've always said World War Two hands were tied. You know, I have so much respect for people. There's other wars that we sent our men and women to, and we told them one thing and they got there. And that thing wasn't actually there. Or we all we gave the intention that we're going to be there for a short amount of time, we ended up there for 20 years.



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That weighed on me a lot too, though, because Afghanistan, I never went to Iraq. And I had friends that I served with that did right. But I went to Afghanistan, and we had a very justified moral reason for going. So regardless of mission creep, and things like that, even by 2011, you could argue, because some Bin Laden got assassinate, we killed Osama bin Laden, May 6 of 2011, which is I was in Afghanistan. I was in Helmand. And you could argue at that point, like, Okay, we got everybody that was responsible for 911. And mission creep started to go in after after that. But it was still a morally justified war. And that's what made the end of it so hard. And the Afghanistan withdrawal so hard is because you know, that we saw a lot of those sacrifices from the Afghan people themselves. And then And then, you know, our military and our allies and partners. And for it to end the way it did. And just all those gains be reversed in a matter of days. It was it was just heartbreaking. So in the same poll that I told you that we did, that 67% of Gen Z doesn't know active duty or veteran, that same poll, we asked, Would you ever recommend military service to a dependent to a loved one? And of the people that said no, we, we did a follow up question. And we said which of these reasons are you know listed as why you would not recommend service. And obviously, the the highest one was fear of death or injury if you don't want your loved one to die or get injured, but one of the next highest ones, and I don't quote me on the number, but I want to say it was like around 45 to 50% said that they wouldn't recommend service because policymakers supporting wars that they would not support. And I think that's a huge key to this is with the disconnect and the information not being shared amongst the the civilian population and then getting only what they see through Hollywood. That's a huge problem. And that's, I think, part of reason why the United States military is seeing the recruiting crisis that it's seeing right now.



James Geering 33:31

Well, I think it's about trust, isn't it? And someone was saying about from the ally, one of the guests had been in Afghanistan, it's like, what happened? The withdrawal? How do we gain trust from allies in the next, you know, war? God forbid, there's another one, when they saw what we just did to the last ones, you know, I mean, it's all down the trust, and again, justification and you know, an honesty. And this is why, you know, like you said, this, this one moment, this, you know, few hours that you spent with this little boy that you carry, you know, decades later. That's one micro trauma of all these people that you know, in list. And so, by simply, like you said, buying into the Hollywood facade, you know, we've got to tell the other story as well, like, hey, just so you know, your 18 year old may also be decapitated on national television. Let's make sure we're having this conversation too. Do you still want to go ahead with this war? Do you still want to start pissing off the Ukraine or Russia or whatever? Or you know, do we do we need to try and be a little bit more? What's the right word? Yeah. Diplomacy. Yeah. And diplomatic as well. Like not immediately knee jerk because one thing is as a complete, non military member white belt outside looking in. It's how



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I hear what you're saying. But also when I when I worked in the Senate, and especially after the Afghanistan withdraw, I it's easy to say We should be more diplomatic. And we should do that. But honestly, the diplomatic corps has its own set of problems. And one of them being is that

like the intelligence community, and like, well, in the diplomatic corps and intelligence community, you know, they tend to recruit from, you know, top to your schools, Harvard, MIT, you know, people that that have master's degrees in international relations, but they don't have a lot of, like, for lack of a better term grit. And like, the social life skills like the State Department, people that were in Afghanistan during the withdrawal, literally, were working nine to five hours, like nine to five, and then after they were done, they just wouldn't process any any si B's or people at the gates until the next day, right. And we see that in Africa, where China and Russia are trying to, you know, insert themselves at our expense. You know, we have diplomats that that won't leave, you know, the the quote unquote, green zone, like where it's safe, they won't go out, you know, in Iraq, this was a big thing, from 2015 to 2018 19, with the persecution of the Yazidis, and we had diplomats that wouldn't leave the green zone. And so, you know, it's easy to say, let's just be more diplomatic before we have to make that choice. And I'm not saying that we should knee jerk to military action by any stretch of the imagination. But it's a multifaceted problem. And I think it starts with trust, like you pointed out that we have to we're losing trust in institutions we're losing trust in, in Americans that are inside these institutions that preclude us from having difficult conversations about necessary reforms. And I think that's, that's tragic.

 James Geering 37:11

Well, one, one observation, again, like I said, as a white belt is simply if you look at the obesity epidemic at the moment, there is a lot of pushback from companies that are making a lot of money selling really bad food and pharmaceuticals, against, well, you know, fitter, healthier people, because that's their customer, from again, you know, a white belt perspective. When it comes to war, there is clearly some sort of pressure from groups of people that make a lot of money when our men and women are fighting that worries me, how do we stop them from again, being the critical mass that forces us into a war that maybe diplomacy without that pressure would have held off on men where we need all those weapons and MRIs and uniforms? I'm not saying that, you know, we don't need in our stuff we do. But we've seen in, you know, outside of the military, when it comes to health in this country, how lobbying and, you know, predatory actions by some of these companies have caused illness and death in you know, literally millions of Americans.

 38:17

Yeah, I mean, unrestricted cash. It's a capitalism is a, a, a system. It's not an ideology, right. And there's a lot of people, particularly in the Republican Party, that, you know, are that in the cult of capitalism, it's under stricter free markets, and companies should have the ability to do whatever they need to do in order to turn a profit and competitive advantage and international trade and, and all this stuff. And to some extent, like what you're talking about, there need to be reasonable restrictions on some of that stuff when it ultimately harms the population. I mean, capitalism has raised more people out of poverty than any system in the history of the world. And there's no arguing that and certainly, our standard of living and our I forget what the term is, like, consume something Well, nevermind, but our standard of living is much better now even than it was, you know, 1520 years ago, and certainly, even even poor people now live better than kings 200 years ago, because they've got running water, they've got you know, better sanitation and things like that. But where public health there's a great example during the baby food shortage during COVID are a little bit after COVID I can't remember exactly when

it was Enfamil not to get too far down this rabbit hole but Enfamil and the other baby formula company, they had gotten the FDA to restrict formula from your opinion countries that each so they can protect their market share in the United States. And these formulas and Europe were arguably healthier, more organic for babies, then the Enfamil on the and the other, the other stuff, it became necessary for the FDA to lift that restriction. And I don't see we're going to, we're going to lift that or reinstate that restriction. But to your point, the fact that it even was there in the first place. That was crony capitalism, and that's not good. And yeah, I, every time I go to Europe, or the UK, I feel like I eat the same type of food that I eat in America, and I eat more of it. But I still lose weight. Because there's not the stuff that is just packed the processed junk that's packed into American food, it's got that bad sugar.

J James Geering 40:53

You're the second person that said that on an interview in 24 hours, the other guest of mine was all over the place, even Africa and he's like, I don't blow you know, and I agree, I go back home a lot. And it's, it's just simply, you know, what are we allowing to be put in our food, it's not that the British or the French have this, you know, amazing kind of cooking that we don't have here. It's just they don't use shit you ingredients.

o 41:16

Here's a great military example to when we were in Afghanistan and I was on to camp Leatherneck a couple of times, I was on convoys down at Lashkar which was the British Air Base and Helmand and on the American base, you know, you go to the chow hall and you have breakfast that's open for three hours, you have lunch that's open for, you know, two hours, three hours, dinner that's open three hours, and you even have midnight rations, so you can go to the chow hall at midnight to go eat and it's all that Ben E. Keith stuff, you know, on the big bass is not on the small fobs, like no way or Eddie or, or pops like that. You're eating Mrs. And whatever you can't eat. But on the big bases, you had those Benny key heated meals. And logistically I get why it was easier because it was a big base. But we go to last year da, and the, the Brits ran it so much differently. It was like breakfast is from six to 730. And if you don't get breakfast, you're screwed. Lunch is from 1130 to one. And if you don't get lunch, you're screwed. You know, dinner and it was all freshly cooked stuff. It was like fresh chicken and fresh veggies and and they even had like a garden where they they grew their veggies and things like that. It was just a much different way of doing things. And I you know, capitalism worked well for America in that instance, because it was a way to get decent ish food in bulk over to American troops. But the British way was definitely healthier.

J James Geering 42:56

Interesting perspective. Well, I want to get to the other side of that question, and then move forward with your own journey. The other side that we also don't hear on the television on the news, you know, either side is the kindness and compassion, whether it was shown by the Allies, whether it was you know, the men and women that you serve with? So what about that? I mean, we have this blanket statement. Oh, we're at war with Afghanistan. We're at war with Iraq. Well, obviously, there's a lot of oppressed people in these countries being terrorized themselves.



43:23

Yeah. 100%. I mean, I think I personally saw examples. I mean, we also had a lot of local nationals, Afghans that were on the base working on the base, and so you got to have some interactions with them. But then, when you were out, like we went through this town Gresh that was near Lashkar and talked with some of the locals there. And I feel like the Afghan people, they just wanted to live their lives. They just they, they wanted to not be shot at and blown up. And, and they were all very nice. I mean, granted, we had guns, but like, they were all very, very nice. And then you just have to look at the Afghan National Army and the Afghan Air Force. They lost 60,000 people over the course of its 20 years, maybe even less time than that, like 60,000 people, just the army, that's not even counting the civilian casualties, although I should note that the Afghan population from the time that America invaded Afghanistan, up into the point that we left doubled. So that's an important thing to point out too, because I think there was there was more stability, there was more freedom for particularly women and young girls. So I think Sure, there are personal examples. of just being nice and being kind to the local population, but I think the American military and individuals created a more stable even with the warfare going on in pockets, a more stable country. And that was that promoted individual freedom, and the ability to better yourself. So there Yeah, I think there was tons of that.



James Geering 45:28

Beautiful. So that's a kind of resounding theme, and a lot of people that have been Afghanistan specifically is there's a lot of anger about the way you know, that withdrawal and maybe the time that they were there, but I think every single member of the military can look in the mirror and go, we made a difference. It may have been at that point.



45:46

Yeah, I, Afghanistan showed us that the United States. Military can't really be beaten tactically, particularly because we had air superiority. We were rarely beat operationally, Afghanistan was a strategic failure. And by strategic I mean by civilian and senior military policymakers that continuously came out and said, we're making quote, unquote, progress in Afghanistan, but couldn't define what that progress was. And it became a self licking ice cream cone. And ultimately, it led to the withdrawal of Afghanistan. You know, you can debate whether or not we should have kept troops there, I think a small force would have been what I would have preferred. I mean, we still have troops in Japan, Germany, South Korea, all places that are now thriving capitalist democracies, and doing very well as societies. I don't think it was unreasonable to think I hated people that would say forever wars, because we weren't trying to be there and conduct warfare forever. But you know, we did make strides for that population that could have been protected, had a small pores been there, and it wouldn't have even come at a huge cost and lives and treasure, likely, I mean, you can't prove a counterfactual. But yeah, that's another reason why it was so heartbreaking.



James Geering 47:22

So a lot of find the word I'm looking for. Again, another common denominator where people seem to struggle, and we start talking to the mental health side now, is the transition. Now in

seem to struggle, and we start getting to the mental health side now, is the transition. Now in the first responder communities, it might be retirement, it might be an injury, but obviously in the military profession, usually as transition out of the military. What made you decide to transition out? And what was that initial transition like for you after six years in this kind of tribe and purpose that you had?



47:56

Yeah, I think it was maybe slightly easier for me, because after I got back from Afghanistan, I was in a reserve unit. And so I spent a lot of my time as a civilian, and then spent, you know, time with my reserve unit for annual training and weekends, and sometimes for temporary, additional active duty, never really more than like a month at a time. But I think it's difficult for people because you join the military 80% of the military is enlisted. And a lot of those people come from disadvantaged backgrounds, they joined for the for the benefits, like the GI Bill and for the VA home loan. And for, you know, to learn a skill to learn a trade to get out of a bad environment, a bad home environment and go join a tribe and go get a steady paycheck and things like that. And so when you transition, you're just all of a sudden, you spent 13 weeks, you know, 16 weeks, whatever, boot camp is now learning to adapt and become a part of this culture. And this team mentality, learn how to do your job. And then you know, you take a two week, you know, PowerPoint, click through tap class on this is what you need to do to be successful as a civilian, you get kicked out thank you for your service, and you lose not only that support system, that peer support system and the chain of command that you had, but you lose your sense of identity. You're like, you know, I was I was a part of this group that meant so much to me, and I spent years sacrificing for the men and women to my left and right. And now you're like, Who do I serve? Now? You know, what's my purpose? What do I do? What do I do? And thankfully, we've seen the veteran unemployment rate 10 plus years ago was skyrocketing. Now it's it's less than the National Civilian average. So it's a good thing. We're seeing more veterans transition out, because there's been more focus on that and get, I think over 95% of veterans have have a job within the first year of getting out. So it may take a little time for them to figure out what they want to do. But luckily, that's, you know, that's the thing. But I think the larger issue that is driven to this suicide crisis amongst the veteran community, and, and mental health problems amongst the veteran community, would be the the lack of purpose and the lack of finding something else to serve. And to replace that gap. And, you know, you can say, if you have a family, make your family who you serve, you know, make your job who you serve, but it's different, because you have that group of people that whether you set it or not, you know, you you agreed to to die or sacrifice for. And, and that's those are connections that sometimes can be closer than even a spouse, and you just you lose that it gets ripped away from you pretty quickly.



James Geering 51:05

So I know, you found yourself in a dark place, kind of walk me through the roller coaster of your own mental health that led to that point.



51:13

Yeah, so we already talked about some of the some of the issues I had from volunteering at the Bastion trauma hospital. And, you know, I got out and the reason I decided to get out was

because to be honest with you, I my brother in law was was kind of right before I joined. And I did kind of chafe in the Marine Corps structure, because I'm the type of person that, you know, I will ask, why are we doing it this way? You know, why this, there's a smarter way to do this, you know, and I was the squeaky wheel. And I was was the one that was like, people people said, Hey, can you just shut up and do your job? And I hated that answer. I was like, there's a better way to do this, like, let's do it. And ultimately, before I got out, a lot of people that used to give me crap for that, you know, we're like, actually really appreciated winning, because it made me think, but But I chafed underneath. Frankly, particularly in Afghanistan, there were one or two people that were in charge of me that and I won't name them, because, you know, we've reconciled but like, one or two people that were in charge of me that I had real problems with, and I did not. I was like, I don't want to put my life in the hands of somebody that I don't think is, frankly, super intelligent, and, or, you know, egotistical and doing it for themselves or so after the the surge kind of drew down President Obama, they came out with a voluntary early release program. And they said, if you're, if you're good on all your training, and everything like that, and you're satisfactory, if you want to get out of the you can. And so I raised my hand, and I said, I'll do that. I don't feel like I have anything left to give the Marine Corps and I don't think Marine Corps has anything left to get to me. So let's go try something else. You know, they, after we got back from Afghanistan, they said, You need to go take a post deployment health assessment, which everybody did, and indicated that I needed to seek treatment for post traumatic stress. So I was still in the military while I was doing that. And then when I transitioned, I still hadn't really gotten over or not gotten over learned to mitigate the symptoms that I was experiencing. layer on top of that, but at the time, I was going through a nasty divorce, and didn't have a job and wasn't in school yet. Not only was that did I feel like I was lacking purpose. But I had, it seemed like everything were the walls were crashing down around me. And when you know, my, my ex wife decided that she wanted a divorce, the way I found out about it was I logged into my bank account one day, and my three quarters of it was gone. And I was like, what, like, what, what and I called her and she was like, I want a divorce. And I took you know, my half of the money, because I was afraid you wouldn't give it to me. And I'm like, Well, you took more than half



James Geering 54:18

off. I'm no mathematician, but it's so I



54:21

was uh, so you know, so there was a huge chunk of like my savings for that I'd say from my deployment that I didn't have so I was stressed out financially. I was stressed out relationship, but you know, all this stuff and probably drinking more than I should have been at that point. And so, you know, one night I just decided to I was like, What am I doing? There's there's no reason for me to be here. Again, I felt alone. I felt like I didn't have a purpose and I was maybe half a pound or a pound away from trigger pull away from becoming a suicide stick. Marine knocked on the door. And I was actually really surprised that the knock at the door didn't jerk my finger and do it stayed with me that night. And then the next day I woke up and I can't really describe it. But it because like I said, I'd been drinking a little bit, but I was not hungover at all. And my mindset, my mindset had just shifted from. I have nothing in the world is crashing down around me to I'm not tethered to anything. Now I have the opportunity to do anything. And how many people get this opportunity to just completely go in a different direction and reset. And I clung to my favorite Bible verse Second Timothy one seven, which

says For God to not give us a spear a spirit of fear and timidity, but a power, love and self discipline. So I decided I wanted to do something differently and kind of set my sail at the time I wanted to. I said, if I as a former instrument of the United States foreign policy, I wanted to go and help shape it in some way. But I had no idea how to go about doing that. So I talked to a friend of mine who was in politics at the time, and she recommended that I, you know, intern, and so I, but I also wanted to go back to finally go back to school and get my degree, I had taken some classes while I was on active duty and in the reserves. And so I had some credits done, but not a lot. So I applied to Texas a&m To go back to school, I got accepted. But I also got accepted to do an internship in DC. Luckily, Texas a&m has a public public service program where you can earn credits for interning in a political office. So I did that. But I still also needed to find a way to mitigate symptoms of post traumatic stress. And I was done taking the pills that the VA had prescribed me, they prescribed some SSRIs, which also I feel like exacerbated my symptoms and lead to the suicide attempt. And so a friend of mine had a service dog and worked tremendously well for him. So I went out and got my own service dog and spent the last of the money that my ex wife had left me and went out and got chi out she was a German Shepherd, and had her trained and all that fun stuff and worked tremendously well for me. But when I was in DC, interning a senator, stopped me on the street and said, you know, most people they see, I don't have a limb missing, and I'm not blind. They're like, why does this guy have service dogs. So he stopped me and asked me about it. And the reason I got into veteran advocacy is because he gave me the idea that he was willing to listen, other people would be too. And so I drafted what became the first iteration of the paws Act, which was an acronym for puppies assisting wounded service members that sought to have the VA provide grant funding to organizations that provide these talks to veterans, because I felt like it should be a more widely accepted and used option. So that's kind of how I got into veteran policy I never intended to, but

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James Geering 57:57

we'll go you're going back to that dark place, I just want to it might not be the case for you specifically, but you know, we have a lot of the rhetoric around veteran first responder suicide, and a lot of it is, you know, break the stigma and you know, 22 push ups and you know, call me bro and all this stuff. But again, I've had over 100 conversations now, I'd say, three quarters, the same amount that your wife took out your bank account of these men or women, which is not half, you know, have had this other kind of element going on that you never hear discuss, when it comes to the suicide conversation. There's obviously this this wanting the suffering to end you know, everything's falling down around you, you know, you're in physical pain, mental hate pain, whatever it is. But so many of them report, it's also feeling like a burden to their family. So when you have the conversation of Oh, it's so cowardly. It's so selfish, how could they and I just spoke to a guy who literally laid out the physiology of it, how this works in the brain, but that Miss wiring that that neuro chemical malfunction, that you have someone that is a selfless act, it's brave at that moment, because they truly believe that their child their infant, we had in Florida, two police officers within a few days of each other a couple took their own lives and they left behind an infant, makes no sense to a healthy brain made perfect sense to them. At that point, it was probably terrifying for both of them. So what about that burdensome element for you? Did you feel any of that at all? Yeah,

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59:27

I mean, I, it was it was particularly because I was going through the divorce and, you know, I

had issues. And at the time, it was I don't know, maybe it was just my, the group of people that I served with, but like, we weren't very open with our struggles with mental health. And in fact, when I started being open with mine, like, you know, in a public advocacy kind of way, a couple of the guys I served with, gave me shit about it and tried to say that like, Oh, you don't have PTSD. Like, you know, you, you know, you didn't do as much as I did or whatever. And we've, they've since apologized and said, Man, I'm sorry, I was just projecting my own stuff that I that I haven't done. But I did, I felt like a burden on I felt like I was just, every time I would talk with a family member, every time I was just, I was venting, and I was I was being an emotional burden on them. Not withstanding being like a financial burden, because, you know, I was I was struggling at the time. And, you know, people wanted to help, but obviously, you know, the economy wasn't really doing great at the time. So. Yeah, I mean, I certainly I felt like a burden. And I'm sure that I'm sure in the moment, I thought, you know, some, some people close to me might miss me. But they're probably better off.

J

James Geering 1:00:58

I think, I just feel like that needs to be put in the conversations put on the posters, because that means that's such a huge red flag that you and I think what exasperates it is police, fire, EMS, military, we're in professions where we've said, if it comes to it, I will die for a complete stranger. So you've also got this profession that's got that service mentality that I think pushes us even closer to suicide when we get into that crisis element. So if you are actually the voices in your head is saying, you're a burden to your children, your family, your your parents, that is a huge red flag to pick up the phone and whoever you feel like you can talk to at that moment, start the process. Yeah, that's



1:01:40

why also, I understand the intent behind it. But that's also why I hate those push up challenges or anything like that, I mean, your time would be better served, just pick up the damn phone and call a veteran, whether you think they're struggling or not just like, you know, call somebody who served with call, you know, whatever, and just maintain those relationships. So that you can keep a good baseline of where they're at. And if you notice, they're starting to slip a little bit and having a hard time you can give them like you or you can refer them to resources that can help and it doesn't have to be mental health is my biggest deal with admission roll call has been very public, advocating for more sensible mental health policies, because Suicide is not inherently a mental health problem, right? We, we certainly, having a mental health diagnosis of something can exacerbate, you know, things that you're already experiencing. But it really is a struggle with the human condition with relationships, and again, like employment and finances and cute financial stress and, and things like that. And so it bothers me because we have this very reactionary approach. And we say, you know, if somebody's struggling, call them or if somebody is struggling, tell them to call 988, which I'm not discouraging, if you're in crisis, totally call 980 or talk to anybody, really. But we tend to focus on the reactionary needs. And if you're struggling, you know, go to the VA and talk to somebody or take these pills. The VAs approach is evidence based therapies, which are pills and therapy, which on their own website for the PTSD decision guide. You know, therapy works roughly 50% of the time, pills work roughly 35% of the time, 40% of the time, but with a whole host of negative, you know, benefits. And we have to be more upstream. And so call somebody,

not not like if you're struggling, if you're not struggling, call a veteran, you know, that you served with call a veteran that, you know, just keep that relationship. Keep that relationship warm. And you'll do more just by doing that, then, you know, probably quite a few people.

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James Geering 1:04:07

Yeah, I agree completely. I mean, I've talked about the push up challenge, you know, it's kind of like the the Ice Bucket Challenge did it really? I think it did, ironically send some money to ALS. But I mean, is it really, you know, curing it? Or did it did it morph into which I think the push ups are too. There's, there's a thin line between I'm doing this for the right reason and narcissism. Let me do it with my friend on my back. And let me you know what I mean, now it becomes a dog and pony show rather than this message. But and I think that I don't know if you found this in your realm. But another thing I see in the first responder profession as you get a few beacons of light, when it comes to mental health, they've been through the crucible themselves that came out the other end. They're they're examples of hope, and they get mobbed by people that are hurting. If we simply went to a buddy system, and each one of us had two or three that we were always going to check on each other. You're far less likely to lose people through the cracks. But if you assume that your peer support guy has got everyone's back, that's how we lose a lot of people.

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I actually have found, interestingly, I mean, you don't even have to call, right? You don't even have to call, I have five, six, or seven, maybe group chats of veterans that I served with, or not even just veterans, like just people, like friend groups. And then I'll occasionally just, it doesn't even have to be service related or veteran related. I'll just send them an article and be like, hey, what do you guys think about this? And we'll start a conversation, and we'll start talking in the group chat. And if I noticed that, you know, one person is not responding as much. I'm not the only one that notices it. You know, I'll try to call that person. And then if he doesn't answer, I'll call another person in the group chat and be like, Hey, have you talked to you know, this person lately? And it's kind of a group mentality of that's, that's not like overtly being like, Hey, man, are you struggling right now? Like, are you thinking about hurting yourself or whatever, it's a natural, hey, this guy is normally really talkative, and he's whatever. And nine times out of 10 it's, it's Oh, man, I'm sorry. I've been so busy. And, you know, my wife, I was doing all this stuff over the weekend, and family was in town or blah, blah, blah, whatever. But that one out of 10 time, it's like, yeah, man, you know, I broke up with my girlfriend and, you know, works not going great and struggling and whatever. And it's, and it's those conversations that they trust you because you've already had that relationship built up. But it's not. So it's not like weird that you're just cold calling them. And you're, you're really helpful. And you can be that person that they trust to be like, well, amen. Like what what kind of resources Have you have you used? Like, Have you have you tried, you know, military one source because there are not military one source of I forget what the organization is, but the one that provides like acute financial help, like in the moment, or have you tried, did you go to counseling with the girlfriend or like what happened with the girlfriend like, you know, just just things like that. So you don't even have to call but just be proactive.

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James Geering 1:07:14

So you have Kaya in tow, firstly, but with Kaya, specifically talk to me about how the canine therapy helped. I got a German Shepherd outside my my window I lost I lost mine in September. So we'll get on the grief side of losing, you know, an animal that you adored. But what what was the addition of a four legged therapy dog for you personally?



1:07:39

Well, she was a legally trained service dog, which has a different classification than then therapy dogs or motional support animals. But you know, I got her because she was specifically trained to wake me up from nightmares when I was having nightmares and use what's called Animal Assisted intervention to stop anxiety, or panic attacks. And it worked tremendously well for me, but I think it worked more so because she provided the sense of purpose that pills just would never do. Mornings, that I didn't feel like getting out of bed, she still needed to be walked. So I still had to get out of bed, and I still had to walk around. And plus dogs are just happy. You know, they're just, they're just happy, like, and they're always down to party, no matter what you say? Or do you can just you can talk like, in a high pitch, Hey, you want to, you know, you want to do this? And they're just like, I don't know where we're going. But yeah, I'm ready. Let's do it, you know. And it's, it's just a, and you don't feel like you're a burden to them. Because they're dogs, you know, and they provide a sense of, of not only purpose, but a sense of responsibility that you can build on. And there's a lot of research that says when you know fingers meet for you get that shot of dopamine or serotonin or whatever it is. So it's, it's, it's been empirically proven, but even the VA who I had to drag kicking and screaming, to support this has acknowledged and research that service dogs can help lower suicidal ideations and lower symptoms of post traumatic stress. So, and I advocated for that, because it works phenomenally well for me.



James Geering 1:09:27

I've had numerous people on the show that it was that dog that stopped their suicide attempt, even the thought that it wouldn't be taken care of it literally came and nuzzled them whatever it was, but that was the thing that snapped him out.



1:09:39

Yeah, there's a there's a great ad that you should watch. That is the most visceral. It is just emblematic of what you're talking about. It's the Royal Dutch Guide Dog Foundation, I think and then you could just Google Search restored, post traumatic stress and it'll come up. It's just really powerful an ad. But I can't tell you since I've been advocating publicly for the pause, act, and ultimately got signed into law in 2021. And then since then, and then especially when I lost kya kya was very well known Kaya. She's the only service dog in history to ever get honored in a speech on the floor of the United States Senate. And you know, she she met the likes of Tim McGraw and Justin Bieber and Mark Cuban and so many people knew her and loved her. And I didn't expect the video that went viral to go viral, but it was viewed like 250 million times. Which is insane, insane to me. But people would reach out veterans and non veterans and say, Man, if it wasn't for my dog, I would have killed myself. And interestingly, there is a well

actually the study is not public yet, so I probably shouldn't talk about it. But but there's there's soon to be evidence to back up what you're saying that a lot of people, one of the highest reasons. The public, not just veterans, but the public does not kill themselves is dogs or pets.

J James Geering 1:11:29

Beautiful. Yeah. I mean, I like I said, I can see it even within myself. And I've never been to the actual suicide ideation point. But I resonate your story resonates deeply. I've been that single father that horrible divorce, full time firefighter, paramedic school, I mean, every stressor you can possibly have, and you know, in as deep as whatever the next click up is from suicide ideation. I was right there and myself. Well, you

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know, there's such a thing as passive suicidal ideation. That doesn't get as much doesn't get talked about as much suicides insidious man, it is, it's it is religious or not, you can you can take this as a euphemism, but it is the the devil himself whispering in your ear, that you're not good enough that you're that you're not worthy that you're a burden. And it doesn't have to be you don't have to get to that point where you have a gun in your mouth, or you're thinking about popping, you know, 12 Trazodone, or whatever it is, I mean, it can be, you know, you're having a really tough day and you're going through a breakup or whatever. And you're, you know, sitting on the road, you're like, man, like I can just just drive off the side of this highway right now. And like, who would miss me? You know, who would whatever and that's called passive suicidal ideation. Like, you're not serious about it. But you have thoughts where you're like, man, you know, driving drunk tonight, you know, maybe, maybe I wrap myself around a tree, nobody misses me, you know. And that's it. That's a huge thing, too. And you should take that seriously, if anybody's listening to this. You should take that seriously and talk to somebody.

J James Geering 1:13:10

I've had a few interesting conversations. And I've heard people, you know, talk about it, they've seen it in combat. You know, some of the, the stories I hear in the fire service, I wonder if that was part of it. But there's some risk aversion. Obviously, if we're risk averse, and it ends up we get take a bullet between the eyes, or we get burned in a fire, or we never get to tell the story. But sometimes you make it to that bunker, or you come out with the baby. And now you're this this iconic hero. But how much of that extreme perceived heroism was actually just complete risk aversion? And that person was really in pseudo crisis by that point, and they just didn't care. And they just happen to survive whatever incident they were in.

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Yeah. Yeah. I mean, there's a I feel like veterans more so than civilian peers, this is going to be a very general statement. So take it with a grain of salt but are likely probably to have a higher predisposition to be Pearl seekers. And to already kind of have that mentality of devil may care and you know, I'm on because when you go to boot camp, especially Marine Corps boot camp,

you come out and you're like, man, nothing could hurt me. Like I'm invincible. Which is absurdly incorrect, you know, but it's the mentality that they kind of breed into you over 13 weeks. And and so you already have that obviously, when you go to Afghanistan and and you and you the older you get, and the Wiser you get, that's the you learn that that's not not true. And you may be you're not as big of a thrill seeker, but certainly if you're getting into that situation where you're you're having having thoughts like that you're, you know, you've already you've already been in that mental headspace once before, and it's pretty easy to get back to

 James Geering 1:14:59

absolutely All right, well then walk me through to the genesis of mission Roll Call.

 1:15:06

Yeah, Mission roll call existed before, actually I came on board, I advocated for the PAs act, graduated from Texas a&m, advocated for the PA that moved here got a job working for the American Legion doing mental health programs and got a job working on Capitol Hill for Senator did that for about three and a half years and then worked at the VA for a little less than a year, during COVID. And then got out of the VA consulted for a few nonprofits than the Afghanistan withdrawal happened. And you know, I'm not going to pretend like I was, you know, running some sort of operation or, you know, the Pineapple Express or something like that. But I had connections in with groups that were helping and conducting and I was just trying to be as helpful as possible and connect people. And I was the only person in my former unit who served at the federal government level. And so I was getting calls from men and women I served with three of whom were on the verge of suicide, that I had to talk down, one was driving drunk, he had two little girls at the time. One was driving drunk and talking about, you know, what was it all for? Why I'm like, why? What did I sacrifice for? Like, why am I here? What am I doing? The other one had a gun in his mouth. So the point being is that, you know, I'm not a psychologist, I just in the moment had to figure out like, what do I What do I say? How do I how do I solve this and just tried to make sure they felt loved, and make sure they felt not alone. And, and be genuine about it? Because I was. But I could see the writing on the wall of how the Afghan withdrawal was affecting people from a very personal real way. And when mission roll calls CEO. He said, Hey, would you be interested in this position, the organization's number one priority is suicide prevention. And so I felt led to go there and see if I could be impactful, because, frankly, you know, I've worked on Capitol Hill, I had worked at the VA, I had worked with nonprofits. So that's a, a level of experience a breadth of experience that I can count on less than one hand that people in DC have. So I felt like I could be helpful to this mission. And that's kind of how we started. And it's a unique model. It's not a traditional advocacy organization, like the Legion and the VFW where you show up to a brick and mortar post. And if you have a good idea, it gets filtered through your local state convention and national convention before it's presented to Congress, potentially. It's very, very direct, you know, if Congress, the VA, or the White House comes out with policy that could impact the veteran community, we have the capability to pull our veterans about that and provide that feedback instantaneously to members of Congress or the VA or the White House and say, Hey, this is what veterans think about this. So just keep that in mind as you craft this policy,

 James Geering 1:18:40

where you have, you know, some of the things that you are you're advocating for broken down, and one I thought was interesting was rural versus for example, urban. So talk to me about the rural vet and how different that is as far as their voice and dissemination of information.



1:18:56

Yeah, that it's intuitive that veterans in rural areas just have a harder time accessing health care, not necessarily benefits like disability compensation and things like that. But they have a harder time accessing health care just because they are, you know, if you're in Alaska, or if you're in Montana, the closest VA facility may be in Seattle, if you're Alaska, or it's something like that. I mean, that's that's an exaggeration. There are VA facilities in Alaska. But so access is a huge thing, which was one of the intents back in 2014, when the Phoenix waitlist scandal happened and VA employees were creating secret waitlist to try to manipulate wait times and veterans died like hundreds of veterans died. The Congress passed the Choice Act to give veterans access to us community providers if the VA couldn't provide health care at a time, reasonable time or distance. Years later, Back updated into what was called the mission act. So now veterans have the ability to use community providers in areas of the country that may not have a VA facility that's close to them, just to give them better access, but accessing care. I mean, I think telehealth has helped. But, of course, now we're seeing instances where veterans are being told that they can only have access to telehealth appointments, not only but they're kind of like pressured to use telehealth versus in person visits, when not everybody prefers that. That's the biggest thing between, you know, rural and urban. And frankly, there are some urban hospitals that get a lot of funding and get and are huge hospitals that are underused. Because there's not that many veterans that are there actually using them. A few years ago, the Congress passed the air commission in the mission Act, which stands for asset infrastructure review, it's basically like a VA BRAC, because a lot of people don't realize the VA is the largest health care system in the United States, and the second largest federal agency behind the DOD and budget and full time employees. And as I mentioned, there are some rural facilities that are that need to be expanded because the populations are, you know, increasing some urban areas that maybe are right next to a, like in Durham, North Carolina, or Raleigh, North Carolina, the Duke Medical Center and surgical center is right next to the Durham VA hospital. And so maybe, you know, they don't need as much infrastructure anymore. They don't. But for political reasons, that initiative was scrapped. So there are things that we get involved in and that we advocate for that are sensible policy. But, you know, it takes time for these things.



James Geering 1:22:00

I know as well, Native Americans are the highest serving ethnicity. If I got that right in the military, talk to me about the tribal element.



1:22:09

I mean, to be honest with you, tribal and rural veterans have a lot of the same problems. I mean, access for tribal veterans is supremely difficult, namely, because, you know, land and jurisdiction of federal resources on tribal land and things like that there are those issues, broadband access, it's really just for tribal veterans, it's more access because of jurisdictional

issues than it is because of just straight problems with access. But the other thing too, is, interestingly, in tribal cultures, suicide in particular, I've found and speaking with, you know, members of the Navajo Nation, in some cultures and the Native Alaskan tribes, suicide is not necessarily viewed with the same stigma, it's it doesn't mean like in Catholic tradition, you know, if you're, if you're in, if you commit suicide, you know, you know, you go to hell, right. It's not necessarily the same in native culture. So there are cultural difference differences with different tribes that make it a little bit more difficult inherently, to solve some of these problems in tribal communities. And of course, in tribal communities like the the rate of sexual assault, and kidnapping is super high for young girls, trafficking for young girls and for veterans and the communities that can affect them in a very traumatic way. So yeah, unique issues for all those populations. But our third priority is amplifying the voices of those underserved populations, telling those stories to policymakers to humanize them. And make sure that during these policy discussions about VA health care and benefits that will affect the majority of the population, these these small subsets don't get missed.

 James Geering 1:24:23

Now, you said yourself that you had no problems when it came to traditional. I use air quotes treatment for mental health challenges or suicide ideation. I've heard that over and over again. They just threw meds at me they said that, you know, it was someone that was in crisis. They said the next appointment was six months away. How you know, what are the tools now you're king for a day? How do we fix it because I come from a country that had national health so everyone had health care, when supported and funded and staffed properly. I think it's the best health care system model on the planet personally, but

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it also takes up like three quarters of your domestic spendings

 James Geering 1:24:59

People are so so bad, they're back at you. If you have a tax base healthcare system and you are a good leader, then you put in a lot of proactive health care initiatives to make the healthiest population you can so they usually healthcare as little as possible. So but the problem is, is that the UK is growing with obesity because we've got the same fast foods and inactivity now that a lot of American does so I think again, fully funded, understood properly. Beautiful philosophy mismanaged understaffed a different conversation.

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Yeah. Yeah. I mean, obviously, the American and the we don't have to get into a inter country debate about health care. But the two systems are vastly different, even taking away the National Health Service and American health care anyways, just because of capitalism, right in in the United States. And sometimes crony capitalism, and but honestly, now that we started talking about this, I forgot what the

J James Geering 1:26:01

yo king for a day, how do we change it so that a veteran in crisis gets help straightaway. So they get options, psychedelics, and ketamine and their therapy dogs and all and the smorgasbord of encouraging optimistic treatments that actually are out there?

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Yeah. My two reforms that I would make immediately that I think would make a huge difference would be that there is a program called the Parker Gordon Fox grants that are housed in the office of suicide prevention. The VAs budget for suicide prevention is 1/10 of 1% of its entire 340 something billion dollar budget. And it's housed in the Office of Mental Health, the opposite mental health gets anywhere from 12 to 14 billion, I think 13 billion in the last budget request for traditional approaches to mental health, but within that budget is 497 million for outrage. Half of that is used for like VA ad campaigns, to try to get people to use VA facilities. 274 million of that is for the fox brands. And the fox grants are up to a \$750,000 per year grant to individual organizations that are on the ground, doing proactive work to prevent veteran suicide, they may be financial services, they may be, you know, like peer to peer group therapy, all sorts of different things. But I think that would be number one, because less than 50% of the 17 million veterans in the United States actually use the VA are enrolled in VA health care and even less use it on a regular basis. So there's a certain percentage of that population that will just never use VA, because they have private health insurance, so they had a bad experience. So you need to empower community organizations with touch points in these communities that the VA does not have the ability to do that. And they're oftentimes working on small nonprofit based budgets, so that grant funding can be huge for them. That would be number one. In concert with that I would take the office of suicide prevention, and make it a direct report to the secretary. So it's out of the office of mental health. Because again, I think it's more holistic than just a mental health approach. Number two, would be to codify the access standards in the mission act and give the VA no choice but to hey, if you can't give the veteran a primary health care appointment, within two weeks, they go out into the community to two weeks, or specialty, if you can't give them a an appointment with a psychologist or psychiatrist and they need one in in three weeks, four weeks, they go out into the community. Right now we're seeing a lot of issues. The VA uses these guidelines and the mission act. There's a interesting saying amongst veterans, if you've been to one VA, you better want to be a because there's their run so differently sometimes. And so some VAs to protect their parochial interest and keep veterans within the system. So they don't, you know, start bleeding funding. They have refused or denied care in the community to veterans who needed it. So that would be my reform number two, and I would I would expand. With that. I would I would force the VA to do an actual like air commission study on recommendations to close VA facilities that weren't being used, expand VA facilities that were being used, and update their model of healthcare delivery. Very

J James Geering 1:30:01

brilliant. Well, thank you for that. So

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I got I got two in one. So sorry,

J James Geering 1:30:04

no, no problem. I got one more area and then we'll go to some closing questions. Kya so I, like I said, I lost my German Shepherd, she was 10 and a half. And I'd actually got another one. My mother did this because I had Shepherd since I was a little kid, and she always kind of overlapped. So as one's getting older, it's a calm dog for the next next puppy. But also, you know, you're not left with with with no dog. But I wasn't expecting me in the past. So youngest 10 and a half is almost medium, but it's still pretty young, as healthy as she was. And it absolutely crushed me more so than any human loss that I've had up to this point. You've been leaning into chi, obviously, she's she's become as you said, you know, that, that that dog that you relied on that gave you purpose? Talk to me about losing, you know, a service dog. And you know, what were you able, you know, what was the next thing for you? How are you able to get past that?

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Yeah, man. I mean, I mean, first and foremost, I'm still not past it. She died in February. And it was devastating. I mean, I didn't it happens so fast. Like all in an instant. She had a growth on her right elbow that was clearly bothering her. But she didn't she wasn't showing any other, like, serious signs of discomfort. So I took her to the vet, and they said, Okay, we can remove it and biopsy it and see if it's cancerous. And and so I did that. And they biopsied it, and it was sarcoma. And they said, you know, it, as long as it didn't expand, like we metastasize. We got as much of it as we could. And so, but she started after she, they put her under on anesthesia for that procedure. And after she came back, she, I thought it was just the anesthesia, like wearing off for a few days. But she started having balance issues. You know, she she wasn't being as interested in things as she normally was. And there was like something really, really wrong. So I took her back end to an internist. And then they said that the they could do an MRI and they could they could do all this stuff, which they did. And then I sent those results to Texas a&m, which is where I graduated and has one of the best veterinary schools in the country to overlook, like to look over the initial findings, and they concurred. They said, you know, the cancer has spread. And at this point, like you could do radiation therapy, and you could do chemotherapy, but you may only prolong her life by a couple of months. And it's not going to be pleasant. And so I had to make a decision like Do I Do I do I want to selfishly keep her around or not. And I said it was like the first interview I did after she, she died. I said, I just didn't want her to be in pain after, after all the pain that she stopped. And not only in me but inspired and other veterans who told me that Kira had inspired them to get their own dogs. And if they hadn't, they would have killed themselves. So I didn't think it was fair to me to keep her around or fair to her to keep her around selfishly, and but it happens so quickly. And but I wanted to give her the best send off I possibly could. And so I you know, I arranged for her, she flew like 250 times on Southwest over 300 times overall. And I wanted her to pass in Texas, which is where we met where she was born where I was born. And so we took her on that Southwest flight and unbeknownst to me, they made they were going to make an announcement and they told they told us beforehand and so Sarah, my significant other recorded it and you know I uploaded it and it blew up and became a thing. So it but it was at the moment I didn't I wasn't paying attention to that I was just trying to cherish the last few days that I that I got with her and took her down to Dallas to say goodbye to family and friends

and then took her to college station to Texas a&m where we were took her to all our favorite spots around campus. I mean she was getting burgers. She was getting pizza she was getting but she was having a hard time eating too because the cancer had spread so quickly. She had a tumor like the size of a golf ball under her under tongue so I was trying to get her like soft foods or like chopped up you know the hamburger and stuff like that. up, but took her out to the Bush Library, President Bush Library where we spent so much time studying and just sat out there with her for two hours. And it was beautiful day just soak up the sun soaked up the last, you know, few hours I had with her before I let her go, but I still have, I still have nights where it's just something random, that'll that'll remind me of or something and I just started crying. And it's, I think as time goes, by, the more time goes by it'll, it'll get less frequent that those things will come up, I almost don't want it to write, like, I want to remember her frequently. And often.



1:35:47

It's gonna be hard not to, but you know, I think it'll, it'll get easier to, to, to think about her and not cry and not ball at least. But she she was so impactful. That I'm never going to forget her.



James Geering 1:36:08

Well, I can tell you now that you've explained what the video was, I shared it myself after sitting on my couch crying because I just lost mine, you know, three months before that. So I know exactly what you're talking about. Now she's there on the blanket, and they're doing the announcement on the plane. But I can still see my I took mine to a kennel, I had to go down south to see my wife, she's in med school. And so we can all mine for a couple of days, usually, because she wasn't a service dog, she was just a regular pet, which I would argue is still absolutely a service dog, just without the you know, the training. But um, and she turned around and looked at me and she just been really weak for like, 2436 hours before. And she just turned around and looked at me. And now that load haunts me, because I know that she knew that was the last time she was going to see me. And I'm even getting choked up talking about now. But um, but yeah, so I mean, that that's, that's such a fucking vicious circle, that you have this thing that you pour your heart into. But, you know, if you last longer than then there's going to be a point where you lose them,



1:37:09

you know, not to get again, I not to get preachy or anything, but you know, somebody wants told me that having a dog and particularly one that, that you're so close with, is almost like the relationship that God has with us, right? Because there's, there's a, we will never understand, happening. We'll never, it's just a concept that we will never know. And it's like explaining the Internet to a dog, there's just a different level of consciousness that they don't have, that you'll never understand. And as a owner, you know, you look down at this thing that is imperfect, it may poop on your floor, it may bite in another dog, it may run and come back. But you love them unconditionally. You know, like God loves us. And when they die, it just because they're not like humans that that are they don't betray you. Right? They don't lie to you. I mean, sometimes maybe they can try to lie to you that they haven't had food yet or something and to try to get more food. But but but it's not nefarious, you know, they're just, they're just kind

they're pure hearted. And so when you lose that it's it's losing not only a friend, but a example of something very pure. And I think Robert Downey Jr. Or somebody said that dogs and infants are the only two things that express and experience pure love. And I think that's pretty accurate.

 James Geering 1:38:56

Absolutely. Well talk to me about Kay's kind of canines them.

 1:39:01

Yeah, so I mean, after kind of passed away, you know, I spent years lobbying for the politics. So I got really connected with service dog organizations across the country, the largest one which is canines for Warriors that's in San Antonio and Ponte Vedra, Florida. But these organizations don't routinely provide veterinary like, like care for veterinary care for their dogs, their graduates dogs. And the only reason that you know Texas a&m took care of me was because I knew the people at Texas a&m From when I was a student, and they recognized me on the field and and you know, after I left a&m, my friend Gary Sinise started a fund at Texas a&m to help veterans with their service dogs. And, but that's not uniform. It's not national. So I wanted to do something a that can give veterans the same resources I had but the to honor kayas memory and her legacy. So I created an organization. And you got to, you know, K K nine s.org to provide emergency veterinary financial assistance to veterans service dogs who get hurt or or need health care. And I've already helped since the organization was set up in late April helped five or six veterans at an average cost of \$3,000 per veteran to which is a huge thing for them. Like every single one of them said, I had no idea how I was going to pay for this and I was financially stressed. And and really one of the other things our tagline is healing dogs that serve veterans, because these dogs are supposed to be you know, tools and press mental prosthetics and he'll help heal these veterans. And so I didn't want these dogs to then become a a problem or a burden for the veterans that they were trying to help. So this was one way that I could continue to help fight that but also to honor Kai's legacy. And if you go to the website, actually the color scheme, the web designers were so creative, and they did this without me even asking. They went to pictures of Kaya. And they used the color of her fur to populate the color scheme of the website, which I thought was just like, phenomenal, man, the amount of thought but everybody loved her, right. So everybody, you know, even people that I was paying to help with website design, we're like, we want to make this really thoughtful. So it was really good. But I'm, you know, I'm proud of, of that organization. It's not my full time job, obviously. And it's, you know, doesn't take a lot of time because you're, you know, veterans apply. I look at the application, as long as they meet all the criteria, I call the Veterinary Clinic, you know, have a nonprofit credit card for the nonprofit, I pay the bill. Done, right. It's not a lot of time, but it's a huge impact. For those veterans who you know, have a vet bill, I had one that had a belt belt for like 5200. And they were like, I have no idea how I'm gonna pay for this. I was like, Don't worry, take a breath. I got you. It's done.

 James Geering 1:42:24

Beautiful. So people that want to donate towards that K K nine s.org. You said,



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Right. Yep. And I would encourage you to become a recurring donor, even if it's just, you know, 510 bucks, everything helps. So



James Geering 1:42:38

you have one and where can people find mission local?



1:42:42

Mission roll call.org. all spelled out. So mission roll call.org. That website is much more built out. We have a poll archive of all the polls that we've done, you can select those news and views things, articles that that I've written op eds, you know, all sorts of stuff, all sorts of good stuff, you can actually opt in to take the polls if you want to do that you can donate. Yeah, it's great resource.



James Geering 1:43:12

Brilliant. Well, I just want to sort of show throw some quick closing questions at you before I let you go. That's okay. Yeah, the first one, is there a book or other books that you love to recommend? It can be related to our discussion today? Or completely unrelated?



1:43:26

Yeah. This is a great question. I love reading. And I love books. I mean, every time I move, I kicked myself because I have so many books, and they're so difficult to move. It's like, Why do I have so many books, but I just love it. This is a great question. Right now, I like a lot of biographies. I read a lot of biographies. But one of the best books I think I've ever read, for obvious reasons, is called the Afghan campaign. And it is a book written by a guy named Steven Pressfield, who's a phenomenal author. About the Alexander the Great's campaign and Afghanistan. It's it's historic historical fiction. So it's not all necessarily historically accurate, but I thought it was a great, it's a fantastic book. Also, on war and on combat by Lieutenant Colonel Dave Grossman are really good, and I think helped me before I went to mentally prepare. I mean, I'm a big Harry Potter fan. So I love I love the Harry Potter books. I think those are the first books I read that actually inspired my love of reading. So, you know, I'll always be grateful to JK Rowling for inspiring that love of reading. Big, big Lord of the Rings guy, CS Lewis. Mere Christianity is phenomenal. I'm reading a because there's a biopic that Ridley Scott is putting out this year about Napoleon. I'm reading Andrew Roberts book on Napoleon. his biographer, Andrew Roberts is probably right now my favorite author, he wrote a book when I was getting my master's degree. He wrote a book called masters in commanders about the Allied Forces and the unified command and World War Two. He's written biographies of Churchill of King George, third of Napoleon, all these different leaders. But he's a he's a phenomenal writer, Eric Larson is another great writer. Devil in the White City. In the garden of Beast about the US

Ambassador to Nazi Germany is another great one. My favorite one that he ever did was the splendid and the vile about Churchill's journey to number 10. And if you've ever seen the darkest hour it's it's kind of that story. So those are just a few.

 James Geering 1:46:08

Is it Joaquin Phoenix Payne Napoleon Have I got that right?

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It is super skeptical about that. But I mean, the trailer looks phenomenal. And I'm super pumped about it. It's good.

 James Geering 1:46:22

All right. Well, then speaking of movies, what about movies and or documentaries?

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This is another hard question. Because I love movies. And one of my special skills is I have what's called an audio graphic memory. So I'm able to watch a movie and like, quote, lines. If you're talking about like drama, I love Interstellar. Inception anytime Christopher Nolan. And Hans Zimmer get together on a movie. It is just gold. I mean, I can't think of one thing that those two have done together that I thought was bad.

 James Geering 1:47:01

Did you like Tennant?

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I love to and everybody was like, Oh my god. It's so confusing. And I was like, it's not confusing. I don't understand why people think it's good music. I mean, yes, I the second third times I watched it I noticed things that I didn't notice the first time but but I love that movie and Ludwig von Goranson who's the guy that did the score. He's not he's no Hans Zimmer. But that was a really good score. He just did the score for Oppenheimer, too. So he's a an Hans Zimmer is one of his, he says is one of his muses, his influences. So you notice a lot of Zimmer and his scores. Love those movies. I mean, honestly, I'd have to break it down per genre per category. It's so hard for me, but I think Interstellar is like one of my top ones, if not the top movie. It's a great movie, especially that end scene, where he's in the Tesseract, and he's looking back on periods in his past that he wishes he could have back I was like, That is such a great way of, of portraying raw human emotion that everybody can relate to, in a major sci fi film, right? Like it's, it was just so brilliant. Other movies, there's a great movie that I just recently watched, where Timothy shall have a plays King George Henry, the fifth King Henry, the fifth called the

king. It's a Netflix special. That's really good. Anything that is like history, because my master's degree is in defense and Strategic Studies. So I love watching there's a YouTube channel channel this guy kings and generals where he has historical he breaks down historical battles like you know ashen core Hastings The got a campaign gall Julius Caesar, like, I mean, all this stuff. I watch a lot of documentaries. I watched a lot of world war two documentaries on Civil War documentaries. Yeah, I mean, I couldn't say that there's one. One that is strange that most people might not necessarily know is HBO did a series a documentary called panic, the untold story of the 2008 financial crisis that I think is a fantastic documentary about that period of time.

 J James Geering 1:49:42

So I want to ask you a question because your academic and lived experience when it comes to leadership and government, etc. We had a discussion the other day, I was talking to an educator. And again, being a white belt, you know, person just from the outside looking in, but sometimes that gives you A different kind of perspective. When I look back through history, I see a screaming common denominator that is usually a small group of very greedy, very power hungry people managed to coerce an entire nation. Now, it could be slavery, it could be the Nazi regime, it could be a number of things. But as we evolve, my optimistic mind is hoping that one day all the way and awakening where the masses actually realize this tyranny before it happens. And we avoid a lot of these well, that they'd be said, you know, we,

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I don't think that'll ever happen. Because I think, you know, to some extent, I mean, history is cyclical, right, Marcus Aurelius. So there's nothing new under the sun. And, you know, at some point, I don't think it's happening yet. But at some point, like, I mean, the monarchies is not really a monarchy anymore. It's a constitutional monarchy, but the royal family has absolutely no power. And that's been a progression. But you know, in the United States, we're a constitutional republic. And maybe at some point, people get so fed up with the institutions and so fed up with the ERISA not aristocratic class, but the, you know, the quote unquote, elite and the administrative state and blah, blah, blah, and they, they shed their government on again, not advocating for that, I'm just saying, I, there might be people like Napoleon, there might be people like Julius Caesar, that take advantage of that societal dysfunction for their own benefit, but nobody really stopped them. Right. Like the people loved Napoleon, the people loved Julius Caesar, the people could, to some extent, those people knew how to manipulate the mob.

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So you know, I mean, yeah. I don't know. I mean, maybe you're right, maybe I'm right. But we're talking about

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historical and philosophical questions that neither of us can answer. But there was another point that I wanted to, oh, another book, because I just quoted Marcus Aurelius. I love the daily stoic which is there's a guy I forget his name Ryan Holiday Yeah Ryan Holiday he does a

store, which is there's a guy I forget his name, Ryan Holiday. Yeah, Ryan Holiday, he does a podcast too. That's really, really good. And I try to read that, too. But I can You can never go wrong reading the classics. You can never just be can never go wrong.

J

James Geering 1:52:35

Let me throw another one at you. Then. Again, my perspective. The last two elections that we've been through which have either side of the aisle, you hear the same rhetoric when the down to the last two people, which is lesser of two evils. King for a day, how do we change the system so that we get the truly best leaders to actually be in these ballots? So there isn't such a polarizing division that we've seen the last six plus years?



1:53:05

It's tough. I mean, within the constitutional framework that we have I don't know. I mean, I think one of the most recent changes or things that people are saying, because of Senator Feinstein and Senator McConnell, President Biden, like, I don't know how you can look at particularly Senator Feinstein and President Biden, and I'm not trying to be partisan about this, like Mitch McConnell can at least sometimes complete speak in complete sentences. And the one, you know, isolated incident of him kind of freezing up in a press conference is it is the cognitive decline? You know, I don't I don't know that the founders ever really thought that we would have an entrenched class of politicians that camped out in the house in the Senate for decades. And term limits might fix the problem, but it might just incentivize corruption for people to pat themselves when they get out. Some sort of upper age limit with term limits might be good might be beneficial. But if it were to happen, I think it would need to go through the constitutional process but I don't know how likely is because people don't want to vote themselves out of a job so King for day one reform to get the actual best people as a veteran I you know, I I like Ron DeSantis because DeSantis is the first combat veteran that served in a a like especially affair of Canada Stan. I hate the fact that our that that a lot of our leaders did not serve the military and particularly if you're going to be the commander in chief, I feel like it's important that you understand The sacrifices that people on the ground make for your strategic decisions. So I like that about them. And I think that's a strong suit. Again, like king for a day, it's so hard because you could say term limits, you could say, I guess that's what I would say, I would say, upper age limit and term limits, you know, make the make the, and, you know, heavier restrictions on their ability to trade stocks while they're in office.

J

James Geering 1:55:29

What about the amount of money they're allowed to use for their campaigns? Because again, it seems to be a demo stock crazy you know, you have to be a millionaire to even play the game. Yeah. I honestly don't have a like



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I don't necessarily think that, you know, corporation should be able to donate unlimited amounts of money to political action committees, and they can't donate to, you know, unlimited money to campaigns and things like that. I also think it's kind of I say, this tongue in

cheek, and kind of jokingly, but I think it'd be funny if politicians had that'd be like NASCAR drivers, and were like, their biggest supporters on their chest or on their back or something like that. Yeah, I mean, the British model, the parliamentary system, where, you know, you guys I think, get a certain amount of money. Once you're a candidate from the state, right. And there's, you can use your own money, maybe a little bit, but it's not. It's a

 James Geering 1:56:34

very small I'm not well versed in British politics. But I know it's a very small amount of money that you're allowed for the campaign now growing up watching a room full of old wealthy dudes waving paper, each other shouting rabble, rabble rabble didn't seem like a great thing to me, either. So I wouldn't say that was the best political system in the world. Yeah.

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I mean, and you end up getting like, you know, rich people running for office, you know, then too, because I mean, for a number of different reasons, because they tend to be, you know, Well, nevermind, I'm not gonna comment on British politics. But But yeah, but I don't know that any of that would, would fix it. But I think that would be where I would start, upper age limit and term limits. And I had a friend of mine argue with me so often, like we have up our age limits, they're called elections and the N terminus, nipple publications. Yeah. But like, the power of incumbency is so strong. That's not a valid argument. To me.

 James Geering 1:57:34

Well, my litmus test is very simple is, especially you know, in times of crisis, a leader unifies. It's that simple. So for the last two times, we've watched people leave and divide. So that's not leadership.

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The problem, especially with social media, and now it's so easy. We're talking about manipulating the population. I truly believe that there are certain people that want Trump to win just because they know he's going to lose, and they can continue this. Like, sorry, excuse me, this, this grift of profiting off people's anger, and being like, oh, stolen election and the other side, and blah, blah, blah. You know, it's interesting, Gavin Newsom, and DeSantis just agreed to do a debate. And there's a lot of people in the media there that are encouraging people not to watch it, because I'm like, these are governors of two major industrial states with completely conflicting ideologies. Like this should be the debate that we do have. Right? And yeah, they're gonna come out and say, you know, America is on the decline, or, you know, the systemic racism or talk about like negative things. But generally speaking, they're going to be more energetic, they're going to be more hopeful about our ability and capability. I don't want to see, you know, President Biden, and, and President Trump, like, just go after each other with hatchets. And it, nobody wants this, like, I can't. I don't well, I shouldn't say nobody, because there's still some just diehards that that are in the tank for both of them. But how much of this is societal? And how much of this is political? Right? That's another question you had to ask.

 James Geering 1:59:26

Absolutely. Well, again, I appreciate your perspective. Like I said, I'm an avid student and all these topics and I'll never, you know, beat my chest about areas that I don't understand. I'll ask questions and listen and learn myself. Speaking of great people, good leaders, is there a person that you'd recommend to come on this podcast as a guest to speak to the first responders, military and associated professionals of the world?

 1:59:49

Yes. One of my friends and mentors is was a guy is a guy that was my commanding general when Afghanistan is name is Lieutenant General retired Mike Dana. He lives out in Tucson, Arizona. He's a super smart guy. Very well rounded one of the most well read senior officers I've ever, ever met in my life. He's a great guy. I have to get back to you on more. I'm certain I have a list of people that would be interesting to talk to. But he's the one that immediately popped into my mind when he said that

 James Geering 2:00:29

beautiful. All right, well put them on the list. Thank you so much. And then the very last question for you make sure everyone knows where to find you. What do you do to decompress?

 2:00:42

Usually I read, play FIFA. I actually love FIFA. It's one of my favorite games to play. And I don't play a lot of video games. But you know, 20 minute knock out a piece again. Really replay fee for take a walk. Listen to Hans Zimmer. It's typically what I do.

 James Geering 2:01:03

You have I gotta say the the interstellar theme is beautiful, and listen to people playing them on all these viral videos, you know, in the middle of a shopping mall and some random piano and then another person joins them. I mean, that one song has inspired so much community.

 2:01:15

Yeah, I mean, it's funny because I feel like I've I've, since it came out, I've been I listened to it. He's only done one tour in North America. And the closest he got to DC was Philly. So I drove like three hours to Philly just to see a concert. And it was phenomenal. But, you know, I've thought he was a genius for years. And, and now it's like, some of these things that have been out for a decade or going viral and thing. But it's just it's nice to see him get recognition because I think he's a genius. I think it's gonna go down. Even more so than like, John Williams and some of these other great composers. I think he's, he's gonna Eclipse them all.

 James Geering 2:01:55

Absolutely. All right. Well, then last question. If people want to reach out to you or follow you on social media, where are the best places to go?

 2:02:04

Well, I'm on all socials except for Tik Tok because I don't want China to have my data. But yeah, I mean, CT layer one on Twitter. CT lie on Instagram. I'm mainly on Instagram. I like that platform. The joke is like, Instagram is where you get things two weeks later after Tik Tok but okay, that's a sacrifice I'm willing to make so that China doesn't get my data. So

 James Geering 2:02:31

yeah, I don't mind waiting to two weeks for someone dresses a strawberry to dance along and lip sync so I can wait more than two weeks, actually. All right. Well, Cole, I want to say thank you so much. I mean, again, not only your actual body of work and the nonprofit, you know, areas that you found yourself in, but also the vulnerability that we need. We need this from all of our men and women, especially in leadership positions, though, that can be vulnerable can be honest about their own struggles. And that will then resonate with the people that listen. So I want to thank you so much for being so generous and courageous today on the behind the shield podcast.

 2:03:08

Yeah, well, thank you for having me on. I agree with everything you just said. And I've always found that the more I talk about stuff that I went through, the more people approach me and say, hey, thanks this this gave me the courage and ability to talk about myself and address my issues. So I appreciate that.