

Jason Friedman - Episode 787

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SPEAKERS

Jason Friedman, James Geering

 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, firefighter and paramedic, Jason Friedman. So in this extremely powerful conversation, we discuss a host of topics from Jason's journey into the volunteer fire service, his path into Paramedicine, losing his parents, his own very powerful mental health story, anger management, the shatterproof program, ketamine therapy, and so much more. Now, before we get to this incredible 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, I do love reading your feedback, and leave a rating. Every single five star rating truly does elevate this podcast, therefore making it easier for other people to find. And this is a free library of almost 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, Jason Friedman, enjoy. Jason, I want to start by saying Firstly, thank you so much for reaching out. And secondly, thank you for taking some time and coming on the behind the show podcast today.

 Jason Friedman 01:44

No, thank you. So it's actually quite quite an honor and a privilege to be here speaking with you.

 James Geering 01:51

Well, like I tell a lot of people you know, this is just to firefighters having a chat. So you know that the honor and privilege is mine as well. So very first question were on planet earth we finding you this evening.

 02:03


Right now I'm in my, my apartment and in Boynton Beach, and actually said somewhat of the significant day taking my 16 year old out driving lessons. Which I'm glad to report that I'm back safe and sound.

 James Geering 02:23

I got a 15 year old that turns 16 And he on his birthday, he got his permit and his Ira were driving so he is hell bent on getting his on his 16th birthday. So I've investing a lot of time to make sure that he's safe.

 02:37

Yeah, yeah, it's she's actually turning 17 in August, and she's had her permit since she was 16. But really hasn't had the desire the motivation to want to go out there. You know, after my experience with her today, that's okay. I don't mind her waiting. But she's doing good. She it was it was actually fun taken around.

 James Geering 03:02

Now we're gonna go into your timeline, your story journey into the first one to professional I'm going to jump the gun just for a second because of this topic that organically came up. One of the hardest things for me is the world of driving from a first responders perspective, because I mean, I think a lot of people think that the worst things that we see are in the fires, but the reality is, I think most of our catalog of horrors come from the roads. And I am kind of appalled at how fucking terrible our driving test is in Florida. I mean, having come from the UK, and then taking it here, you know, I thought it was a warm up for the real test. And, you know, we basically drove around the block, parked, you know, drove into a parking space and the guy five meters like congratulations. I was like, oh, okay, that's why so many people die in this country. Now I got it. But with that being said, and all the horrible things that we see, it's very hard to kind of cut the apron strings when you have to trust your child to go out. So what has been your whole kind of lens on the fact that your little girl is one day going to be driving on her own? And joining some of the lunatics that we know exist out there?

 04:12

Yeah, it's, it's definitely pretty scary. She is my third of fourth or fourth, Ford children. So my two older children. One's turning 25. So she's been driving for about six, seven years and my son who's 20, almost 21 has been driving about four years.

 04:35

And yet each time they get a driver's license, you know, it's like a license to kill in both directions. And fortunately, my oldest daughter actually she's, she's a very good driver. She's very patient. She's very, you know, she's she did not want to speak no road rage. You know, I know she doesn't you know, Lisa, I'm assuming she doesn't tell didn't drive and stuff but she's

very, she's very good. She's very responsible. My 20 year olds, a little bit heavy on the foot a little scary. And I've driven with them a couple of times, I think that's probably going to be a while before I drive with him again. But fortunately, he hasn't been in one accident, stupid, but other than it's scary, it's like, you know, your kids. You know, it's like the next step of trust in their life, it's a huge step. You know, it's one thing dating and so forth. And obviously, drugs and stuff that goes on at school bullying, and all that stuff. And not that you take it for granted. But until you actually realize that they're going to be driving the vehicle. And I told my daughter today, I said, you know, realize that this is, this is a machine, this is something that will kill, and whether it's you or somebody else, I said, you have to look at it as you know, your, your the safest thing on the road, and everybody else's, is horrible. She's scared, she's nervous, which is good. But you know, I think the scary part of it is, you know, just building that confidence, and, you know, not forgetting things. It is different, because like, when I was driving, or when I started to drive, my dad took me out. And I think he had like a, like, Cannon tell you like 1984 Honda Accord, which was like a little toy box. It was like, it was like a, you know, go kart. And it was, you know, it's fairly easy to drive and stuff, but it was basically put me on the road drive. And, you know, nowadays, I think it's just with the technology, the things that come the distractions in the car, the things that, you know, we took for granted that we didn't have, such as backup cameras, such as, you know, you know, those types of things, you know, warning systems, which you would think would make it safer, but sometimes from you know, I think a kid's perspective, it's, it's a hindrance, because they pay more attention to that than they do have the traditional, keep your eyes on the road, always look into your left your right rear view mirror, your speed and so forth, which we became accustomed to, because that was what we had. So I think it's it's definitely a challenge these days, and especially 95 identified as being the most horrendous road in the country. It's scary, especially things that I've witnessed, and I've seen, and a lot of it has been, basically because of stupidity, road rage, obviously, the texting and driving and stuff and obviously driving under the influence. Unfortunately, without it, it seems like in our profession that we see the ones that are driving under the influence come away with, with nothing, minor injuries, it's what you know, it's what they do. To kill others or damage others and destroy lives. So yeah, it's it's nerve racking, so I'm not I'm okay with her not being in such a rush. But listen, she'll, she'll get it over time.

J James Geering 08:28

Yeah, well, I think the the fear or healthy respect of the magnitude of what you're doing is to be encouraged that my son's become a good little driver. I mean, he's still sitting next to me, but he's very calm, very patient. But I told him, like, I want you to stay driving like you want to now you are driving well, you know, but some toolbox pulls up next to you, and revs his engine that that fucker go, you know, someone you know is riding your ass worst case, pull over that and go by and pull back behind them again. But it just blows me away, because we watch the planet gets shut down for ultimately 10s of 1000s of people. You know, and obviously that eventually got into the six figures and, and beyond. But I mean, initially it was on in that magnitude and we lose 40,000 people every year on the roads, we have something I think it's I want to say either side of 5 million accidents 40,000 Die, I mean, hundreds of 1000s Probably have life changing injuries after that and psychological injuries. And yet zero discussion on Let's improve the standards. Let's make the test harder. Let's educate the why behind blinkers distance, etc. And so, you know, it's interesting how, when it fits the politicking they're all about. Let's have the counselor on the bottom of the news channel and you know, let's talk about this 24/7 But, you know, I guess I guess deaths on the road just aren't cool enough to address.



09:56

And I think to the age you know, I'm sure I'd get a You know, an argument started in regards to raising age for for drivers. Just because that, you know, at 16 years old, they don't have that capacity of full capacity of really understanding, pulled back magnitude of what they can do with that car. And, you know, there's the immaturity, there's the things, you know, again, especially with technology, you know, that they're constantly on their phone, they're, you know, which is fine. That's, that's the way that they get their information and so forth. But it's very hard to now say, Okay, you get into this vehicle, we take that away from you, it's hard, it's like a hard habit to break. So I think that it would be, you know, maybe, to me, it'd be okay, I would be okay with them raising the driving age to maybe, you know, 18 years old. If you're considered an adult at 18, then maybe that should be your responsibility as an adult, is it going to make much of a difference? I don't know. But at least it's a place to start and to possibly look at it. And it godly, look at the insurance, you know, that it costs to cover your kid. And that's, you know, that's without an accident. And that the reason is because there's a high probability that they're going to have an accident. And that that's why the insurance premiums are so expensive with you young drivers. So yeah, that would be education. And obviously, I think, like they said, the raising age would be something they think of look into as well.



James Geering 11:43

Yeah, well, the UK is 17, which I think would be a good kind of happy medium, because, you know, 17, a lot of our graduates are 70. And we're just about to turn 18. So you know, you'd have that, that independence and be able to go to college, work, whatever comes next. But the standards of the test, I mean, that, to me is where you really make the difference, because in the UK, usually is certainly when I was younger people were passing and like second or third try. That's how hard it was astringent it was you know, and it was all kinds of skills. I mean, you know, parallel parking and reversing around a corner and hill starts and you know, roundabouts and you name it, they're educating you on everything that you may come across, because that's what you need to be taught I watch roundabouts put in in America, and it is almost caught if it wasn't the fact that people are getting hurt. It would be funny, but it's not funny because people are getting hurt and killed. But to just take two seconds to go google how do I use a roundabout if you don't know how to? You know what I mean? This, this is where we're at? We're just like, well, you know, give them the keys. And they'll work it out, though they do. Yeah, sometimes on the side of the road sometimes smashed through the windshield. They work it out. Right. But does it end? Well?



12:54

No, I know. And I was actually we have roundabouts in my neighborhood. And in today we're talking about roundabouts and how they work and stuff. And it because she's you know, she was with a friend of hers that obviously did not know the rules of the road when it came to roundabouts. And I can't like she's been people would drive it around my neighborhood and going through the roundabouts myself. I can't tell you how many times that I'm like, Oh, God, like You're such an idiot. Like, you know, as you're going through in your inner circle, somebody's coming out. And so like, it's so simple, but yet, yeah, I totally can understand, I guess, you know, like I told my daughter, I'm like, in fact, like in England, I said, you know,

these guys are going around roundabouts, it's like a, you know, it's very common. And it's very thorough. It's very smooth. I said, it's because it's a way of life. They see here it just if they put them up and there's no explanation other than, you know, yield to the humans for the current that circle, which half the people don't even realize what is human. You know, it's going to just slow down a little bit. But yeah, it's a little ridiculous at times.

 James Geering 14:05

Yeah. Well, interesting perspective. Thank you. So let's get to your childhood then. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic what your parents did and how many siblings?

 14:17

Sure. I was born and raised what we refer to as Upstate New York, Albany, New York, the State Capitol, the three hours north, directly north of New York City. I was the third or the youngest of three boys. My two older brothers are nine and 12 years older than myself. So I guess it was the proverbial accident, I guess you would say whereas my brothers would say that I was the mistake. But my parents have been married or were married until their deaths. My parents were together for their marriage for 50 years, together for 55 years, my dad was an accountant. And specifically a CPA and my mom was his administrative assistant for the better part of 30 years. So when in growing up, I basically became somewhat of an only child by the age of six, and really nine years old, because my brothers had bone heads, going off to college, and since then had, you know, obviously started in with they're building their own lives. So life was actually wasn't too bad. I wouldn't consider myself the spoiled brat. But I definitely enjoyed probably more things than or had more opportunities, then both my older brothers just because they were both within the same age range, you know, three years difference. So whatever one got, the other one had to get when I came along. You know, like I said, the last one was nine years ago. So there, you know, I guess I got a lot of opportunities that they didn't have, and it was cool. You know, I grew up in a very normal, typical Jewish family, with me being the exception to the rule. Both my brothers are successful. In the medical field, my oldest, my middle brothers, radiologist, in Connecticut, and my oldest brother is a CPA, like my dad, in West Hartford. And he's also in the music industry, which does a lot of accounting with professionals, both artists, as well as other types of musical backgrounds. merchandisers, manufacturers, and so forth. But we had a, you know, I had a good upbringing, you know, nothing. I left, because my brothers and I talked about it, you know, like, back then it was the norm, you know, we didn't, we had our typical dysfunction, you know, some yelling between my parents and so forth. I think there was more of a change of direction as I got older, as far as who the disciplinarian was, I guess, when my brothers were growing up. My mom was the one who was the nut job who is handing down the punishment while my dad was the one who was chilled. By the time I started pushing the buttons that my brothers didn't push, I take kind of took a turn, my dad was the one who was the disciplinarian, and my, my mom was the one who was chill. I was also the guinea pig for my brothers. I was the one who, you know, if they wanted to test the waters, they would, they would send me to do it. And especially with some of their friends and whatnot. I remember one example was when I was I think, like four years old. My brother told me to, you know, flip the middle finger and give it a kiss. And that meant I love you. So he proceeded, send me out to the living room, or my parents were having a party and tell everybody good night and that I loved them. So here I am walking out in the

middle of the party, flipping the bird and kissing the bird, you know, to everybody thing, good. That didn't last long until my father got a hold of me. But realize where where it came from. Yeah, other than that, you know, growing up, in all it was great. It was very conservative, somewhat political area, obviously, being the state capitol. There, you know, I grew up in a multi ethnic background or area. We had, you know, Irish, Italian, German, Greek, you know, all in my neighborhood. So everybody was just, you know, it's like a melting pot. And none of those ethnic values really played any role in regards to my childhood. As far as, you know, having issues with anybody, it wasn't like the stereotypes that typical stereotypes that are thrown out there never existed, you know, with me growing up, I had friends of all world types of ethnic backgrounds. I kind of meshed into, you know, everybody seemed to mention to everybody, which was really good because, you know, I had a really good childhood, you know, as far as with friends and you know, Getting into sports and stuff, there was a lot of great times. You know, as I got older, I was involved in a lot of sports, mostly baseball, I played baseball since I was like six years old all the way up through to high school. And I played a variety of other sports, tennis golf, didn't really get into got into swimming a little bit. But that only lasted maybe like a year or two. But I really enjoyed that camaraderie of being part of that team concept. And obviously, I think that's kind of one of the variables that drove me into wanting to do what I do for a living. The other aspect of it, you know, growing up in Albany was the time that I had, because of being an only child, I had a lot of opportunities to spend really good quality time with my parents. Especially my my dad. And my dad was like I said, he was an accountant. So from like, January to April, he was busy with the tax season. So but he will, he was always there. My both my parents were always there for sporting events, you know, whether you know, any of my baseball games and so forth, they were always there might not have been really involved as far as grooming me, within the sport, never really never played ball with my dad never had a catch with him. That was always my middle brother, my little brother was the one who was athletic. My oldest brother was the one who's into the music. So I got the best of both worlds from both my brothers, the love of music, and obviously, baseball. But I remember going to, you know, a bunch of sporting events with my dad, when he was a member of he's a member of the Masons and a couple other organizations. And there were nights that, you know, he was in a bowling league. And I remember like, when I didn't have school, the next day, he would take me with the, with a group of his friends go bowling, after bowling, they'd always go to like the diner and have something to eat afterwards, it was just cool. It was it was really good times. You know, basketball events, we went to a bunch of basketball games together in high school. And it was just it was that that bonding time that I really enjoyed having with, with my dad, in this ties into a lot of wood has developed over the years. You know, I I feel as if that my childhood was I thrived on attention. And I want to make that clear that not the Look at me attention. It was I enjoyed the time spent with you know, especially my father, you know, I enjoyed that attention.



23:16

And, and again, because I had the fortune, you know, the, the fortune of being able to have that because my brothers, they had their time with him. But it was always in twos. With me, it was just men. And and I really enjoyed that. And as we grew, you know, as I grew up, and it was in high school, there were a couple of games that we went to, and I remember one event, it was a basketball game, my high school was going to like the state champion championships. And, you know, sitting with my father, a bunch of my friends had come up to me and they're like, Hey, we're sitting down over here. My dad's like, go, go, go sit with them. And I didn't, I was like, now hanging out here. And, you know, I learned later Ron, that was probably one of his proudest moments. Because he was in that same position years ago with his own dad. And

he made the decision to go and spend the time with his friends. And it was something that he had regretted. And, you know, it was, you know, something, I guess, you know, from what he says there was just it was a proud moment to know that like, you know, even as I got older, it wasn't the cat's in the cradle proverbial, you know, growing separate from your your father or away from your father. So, yeah, that was I guess my for the most part of my childhood growing up. You know, I it's funny, I shouldn't say funny, probably poor choice of words. I played basketball for an organization remain anonymous on that. And I did have the inappropriate experience in which I was inappropriately touched by a coach. And it wasn't anything major. Well, you know, I guess I'd minimize it. It was an inappropriate sexual touch, and it was a second. And I kind of like, brushed it off, you know, for the most part, I never really thought much about it. It bothered me a little bit. But, you know, I joked around about it, you know, with friends of mine, you know, because they all knew this, this particular coach, and in only a couple years ago, that I bumped into a friend of mine that I had played basketball with during that timeframe. And I jokingly said to him, because we haven't seen each other in probably 25 years. And I said, you know the coach's name, I said, Hey, Did he touch your penis also? And with that, the, it's like, I flipped the switch, and his eyes started to water up. And I'm like, like, What the fuck did I just say, you know, and then he proceeded to tell me that he was sexually molested by him on a number of occasions. And he came out fine. We came out at that time, that a friend of ours who I knew he would play basketball with him he was on the team had killed themselves five years prior, he hung himself, because he was sexually molested by this asshole. So, you know, did it have an effect on me growing up? And, you know, looking back and saying, is this was this part of, you know, is this a variable in my mental health issues? I don't think so. I can't see for, for certain, but I do know that. I remember, like, after that event took place. I never said anything to anybody. You know, until obviously, two years ago, I told my my brothers and some close friends of mine about it. And, you know, it did go to I can't really talk about it. But there was the statute of limitations were far beyond it. So there wasn't much that I could do criminally. But from a civil standpoint, there's a non disclosure, so I can't really talk about it. But that was the only compensation I guess, were what had taken place. And it doesn't erase or take care of what had taken place. And it wasn't be so so to speak, that I was really pissed off about it was more about what had taken place with my friends. Because I was fortunate for this nation say that's a bad word to use. My situation was anything like what they endured. Mine was like less than a two second thing. Nonetheless, it was wrong. But I didn't realize what the magnitude was. And I the only regret I had was not saying anything back then. Because had I said something maybe it wouldn't have happened to them, or wouldn't have gone the distance that it did with a friend of ours that had killed themselves. But I do remember having some behavioral issues thereafter. striking out I remember getting into arguments with my parents or something and I punched holes in the wall. And I just thought that was just part of the growing up process. You know, but looking back at it, I think maybe that had something to do with I really don't know. But nonetheless, after that had taken place, you know, I graduated from college or from high school I went to University of Hartford for my freshman year, didn't really do well, they're, they suggested that they take a semester off and reevaluate myself. So, you know, I started a fraternity and dabbling smoking pot every single day. And so it was like, Alright, maybe take a look at another school. So I chose I went to Western New England College, which is now Western New England University and Springfield, Mass, and ended up going there and got my Bachelor's, business administration major to market thing. And I graduated in 1991. Thereafter, I was contemplating what I was going to do for my career, my girlfriend at the time, her dad was in the garment business in New York City. And that kind of got me interested in doing something with either manufacturing or textiles and so forth. So I ended up moving down to Westchester County, just just north of New York City. And I started in as a sales rep for a textile manufacturer. And that that lasted maybe a year. Just I really wasn't into it. I didn't like being in an office, I didn't like

being on the road, selling things, trying to haggle with prices and trying to, you know, it just wasn't my cup of tea. I did at that time. started getting interested in, in volunteering as a fireman, one of my friends that I went to college with, I remembered in that county was a volunteer fireman. I remember him talking about I remember seeing pictures and stuff. And you know, we had talked, you know, recently. He's like, you're right, close to Hartsville, I was living in White Plains. But on the border of Hartsdale, which is a small little hamlet. And they have a career volunteer department. And so I went and I looked into it, and I ended up joining, they sent me to the Fire Academy, which wasn't as extensive as a career firefighter, but it was basically comparable to like a firefighter one in order, you know, in Florida in order to be an interior structural firefighter. So I started doing that, and I really fell in love with the just that camaraderie that fellowship. You know, I really didn't know what the value of the Brotherhood was, until I started in that service. You know, growing up or being predominantly in a white collar world. I didn't know. Other than the team sports that I played in, really what was great about being part of the service. So I started doing that I was, you know, as well as bouncing back, bouncing from a full time job, to another full time job and electronics, surveillance sales, which again, I really just wasn't liking. But in the meantime, when I was doing the volunteering, I met a person who had



32:53

talked to me about becoming an EMT. And because we're just like, first responders, we only had like CEFR training. And he said, listen, the state will pay for it. If you volunteer for the ambulance organization, which was in Rockland County, next County, North of the city, or next to the road adjacent to Westchester, the opposite side of the Hudson River. And I was like, Okay, in this gentleman that kind of talked to me about it was a father of a close friend of mine, girlfriend or whatever. And he just, he took me under his wing, and I took the EMT class and I started writing Friday overnights with him, and he became like, my second father, he was the head of the ambulance corps. Who's you know, I guess a legend in his own right. And we just gelled, you know, he literally was like, you know, a father figure to me, and I just had the great Greatest of All Times Riley with that. In doing that, I started really enjoying being volunteering and teaching. But I don't I just wanted more out of it. So you know, I was like, Okay, you become an EMT. You know, you start thinking to yourself, while you're becoming an EMT, I'm gonna save lives. You know, I know it's cliches, and it sounds cheesy. And yes, did emergency play a role in it? I'm sure Johnny and Roy did. But I really did think that it was I was going to have an impact on somebody's life. And it was a really cool feeling. Once you became an EMT, you suddenly realized that you don't do shit. It's the paramedics that do the do the work. And I don't mean that negatively. I jokingly say that they we all play a valuable role and taking care of somebody. But really, when you're an EMT, you realize that the paramedics are the ones that start the the IVs they get the medication through able to read EKG Geez, all these things, it's like you're thriving for the next level in New York was very competitive to go to paramedic school. Back in those days, it wasn't through the colleges, it was through the hospitals, their hospital paramedic programs, very competitive to get it, you need at least 1000 1000 hours. In order to apply to the paramedic program, paramedic programs, there were only nine months or 10 or 12 month programs. They're not like the three semesters or two year process. It was all jam packed for a whole year. And I was able to get into a program with only six months experience because my instructor for DMT was a very awesome, very well known paramedic in New York City. And he had some influence in getting me into the paramedic program in Westchester County. So I ended up going there became a paramedic. And during the time I was in training, I got hired in New York City started out as an EMT. In the Bronx, for Our Lady of LED Mercy Medical Center in North Bronx, which is it's been changed since I left I

think it's part of the Montefiore system. But that was like the, you know, the eye opening experience of a lifetime. I had done a couple of rides in Brooklyn. And that really got me turned on to wanting to work in the city. It was far beyond anything that I could imagine, especially in the Bronx. You know, even though we're in the north Bronx, we went into the South Bronx. And it was, it was incredible. It was I had some really great partners. I had some really good times. It just, it was amazing. We saw everything, you know, obviously, the shootings and stabbings, the fires, but also really good medical calls. It just really motivated me to want to do this. And it was awesome. I had an incredible time. After I was working in the city, and I became a paramedic, it was very normal up in New York to have a variety of per diem jobs, you might have like a full time gig, which I did, initially after getting into medical school working for a company called Empress which handled it was a contracted for the cities of Yonkers in Mount Vernon. So I was working my first medic job there. And that place was awesome as well just you know, a lot of experience just north of the Bronx. So very similar areas and, and what it had to offer. But I was also working per diem up in, in Rockland County as well for an ambulance company, or paramedic company. And that covered like about a third of the, the county. And it was just about that time was like around 97. That's when I started to get those memorable calls. You know, when I was an EMT, volunteering, I remember my first cardiac arrest, I remember his name. I remember, you know, it wasn't the arrest, it wasn't the arrest that bothered me, it was after we brought him to the hospital, and he was pronounced and then they once they cleaned him up, and they allowed the, the family to come in, and the wife and the daughter, and you hear you know, yelling his name. And the sad part was the you had the same name as my dad. And so as I'm hearing this, you know, the envisioning, like, putting my dad and in that place, and my dad has not read that yet. They just, you know, I had walked out and I didn't have any I don't think had any detrimental effect to me. I wasn't having nightmares or anything, but it was just, it was my first emotional experience in dealing with, you know, death and the consequences, or the aftermath of death that it has on on the family. And so that was kind of my first experience. In 97, I was working as a paramedic with a what's called a fly car system. We had two paramedics and we We branch off on call. So we had a call, I dropped my partner off with another call came in, I took the vehicle respond to the second call in the ambulance that my partner would be going to the hospital with, we dropped them off, or we'd intersect somewhere after. So my first it was like my solo call that came in. For a, it was like a two or three year old pedestrian struck. And there really wasn't any information other than it said the child was was struck while backing out of the driveway. So I was like, okay, so it wasn't a high speed type thing, you know. So kind of, I guess the routine. So I'm responding, I'm about 10 minutes out, the ambulance corps gets there, and they get on the radio, they tell me that she was run over by the car back and out of the driveway. And the EMT on scene was like, you know, you know, should I put the helicopter on standby. Because in our county, the trauma center was across the river in in Westchester. So it would have been like a 40 minute drive versus 10 minute flight. So I said, while you're there, make the call, go don't put them on standby if you want them have them, you know, launch. So they did that. I got there. And in here's his three year old girl who reminded me of my niece, who is roughly around the same age, my middle brother's daughter, she had these curly blonde hair. It wasn't it wasn't a thing gory or anything, you know, traumatic to look at, other than she had a white shirt on with tire marks on it. And she wasn't an arrest. But She obviously was in some great distress. So I ended up having to, you know, intubated her we got an IV on the kid and the helicopter lady took over and took her to the hospital. Two weeks later, she had passed. But during that time, she had a brain bleed, seizures, collect, you know, complete organ failure. She had failed segments collapsed lung me just horrible. In it was like a, a freak accident. Kid was in her car seat. Her aunt was the one who's driving, she put her in her booster seat was that she was backing out the kid, unbeknownst to her, was able to get out of her seat and open the door. And obviously back then, you know, I



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don't know, I can't remember the age of the car. But it was obviously probably been before these child safety locks and so forth. And kid was able to open the car door. And by the time it registered as she's backing up, she, you know, she backed up over the child. But I just you know, it's those images of association. And I think that that I think all of my trauma that I've gone through has been personal. And when I say personal, I don't mean that, you know, the connection between me and the patient. It's not so much the incident. It's the personalization of the incident. It's what you know, the surroundings of the event and what took place and things that occurred thereafter prior to and so forth. That makes it more impactful I guess for lack of better words in my in my mind. The following year, you know, and I didn't have I don't remember having any kind of flashbacks or you know, horrible dreams and stuff. But I do remember becoming callous. I do remember becoming almost as my one partner had said to me an arrogance thought



James Geering 44:29

that compassion fatigue.



44:31

Yeah, yeah, like this is bullshit. Like, why are you calling me? Yeah, I was being an asshole. Hands down. You know, like, especially in my area. At that point I was networking. The New York Presbyterian in Washington Heights, which geographically it's just the Northwest section of Manhattan, along the George Washington Bridge area that leads into New Jersey. And the majority of my area's Dometic. In, in, in their culture, they typically call 911. Or they go to the hospital for bullshit. In other words, like the sniffles, the colds, and so forth, that's, you know, where they typically go to, to take care of the, you know, that kind of stuff, they go to the specialists or the clinics for the cardiologist, or their endocrinologist and so forth. So it kind of made sense because most of my great calls, or valuable calls as far as Cardiacs, strokes, and so forth, we're all coming out of clinics. And I didn't realize this until I had a partner that was part Dominican and would explain to me, so he started having a better understanding of in that area. But I remember I was I'd walk into somebody's house like this is nonsense, like, why, why can't you just walk two blocks at a hospital? What am I going to do? You know, taxi, it just just, I guess, for whatever reason, that was just my mindset at that time. And I didn't realize why I never really thought twice about it. Of course, you know, you're you're kind of like in denial that there's anything wrong, you think that that's just the way it is. I had when working per diem in the Bronx, I had a walk duty motor off to the police officer that took a spill off the bronzer Parkway in his motorcycle. And I just so happened to be outside the emergency room entrance to our hospital. My partner was actually inside with the stretcher transferring the patient over and I was just cleaning up. And this guy comes up on his motorcycle, and he's like, You need to help me because my buddy just dumped the bike like a block away. And I could actually see from where I was standing where, where he was laying, there was a couple other motorcycles next to him. And I'm like, I gotta get my party. He's like, Come on, man. He goes, he's he's fucked up. He's really fucked up. He's a cop. So with that, I jumped in my ambulance and was referred to the bus. And I go over there and I'm telling dispatch, what I'm doing. However, the repeater system is down so nobody can hear me other than the dispatcher, my partner doesn't

even know where. So I go down there and this guy's fucked up beyond belief. You know, I had to secure his gun, I had to, you know, take his helmet off. He ends up having like bilateral flail segments. He's got a brain bleed. He's just pelvic fractures shattered. He literally got launched off his motorcycle and slammed his head into the curb, and just everything went forward. And here I am by myself and I got units coming. But the closest unit that I have come in is from the South Bronx Zoo. It's a busy night. So I have nobody coming to me for about 10 minutes. We had a patrol boss in the area that did end up coming on the scene. I had no stretcher to put this guy in. I'm intubating the guy, they're on the road. And the hospital is like 100 feet down the road. And it's not a trauma center, it was a level two Trauma Center. But because technically, I had no other choice, I had to take them there. So I literally took the backboard, the patrol boss showed up, jumped in the you know, the driver's seat and took me to the to the hospital and brought him in and so forth. And I shit United it must have been 20 minutes later that I walked out of the emergency room. And there was like a sea of blue lined up in the back of the hospital from all over there was a breast all the way to the top that were at the emergency room. I don't even know how the call got out and so forth. But I remember having to take him up to Westchester Medical Center up there. And he was taken off life support like the next day it just you know, the the personal aspect of it was just you know, he ended up working in one of our local prisons today. I knew of him I didn't know him personally, but I've seen him on jobs and stuff. And it just like you know, it's they are you know, they're they're part of our service. They're, you know, they're you know them intimately without really knowing them personally. You see them you're with them. You're there to do a job there. Their job is law enforcement. Our job is EMS and but we all work together and it becomes very intimate. At times, and that kind of really fucked me up a little bit thereafter is just, there was no explanation. And then now I start looking for explanations for things. And then fast forward two years, to 2000. And it is Sunday afternoon in June, actually, it's the 18th of June. And it's Father's Day, and I'm not married at that time. My girlfriend, who is a mother of two, you know, I really didn't celebrate Father's Day, obviously. So I was working in New Jersey, and a car, I think it was like, in the afternoon, a car had come off one of the highways and slammed into a Starbucks storefront window, and pinned up a gentleman that was sitting in the back of the Starbucks on his computer. And we got there just as about there, just at the time, they were about to lift the car off of him with the airbags, and he was conscious. And I've become accustomed to this, because of all the subway jobs that we would do. People were conscious, and until we put the airbags and lifted away, the subway car, the car itself, and so forth. And because of the tamponade, they were just saying when a die. And just the look on this guy's face, you know, just, he really wasn't coherent, but he was conscious and just modeling stuff I couldn't really understand. And as soon as they lifted him off he became unconscious, back then we were using the mass trousers, or the shock garments and fishhook arms. And we got it on him got him in the back of the ambulance. And I don't like what two minutes I had pulses. Two minutes of CPR, we had to, you know, obviously IVs going and we had pulses back. And I was like, Alright, this is a good thing. And we had a blood pressure. And this was the first time in my career that you know, you when you go on a dramatic arrest, you stay in dramatic arrest. You're talking about 100th of 1%. So we got into the hospital. And unfortunately, as with all the cases, they take the pants off, and they die. So they find out later while I'm at the hospital that again, remain anonymous because we'll make sense of it. After I tell you this gentleman happens to be from California, who's in town visiting his father and mother for Father's Day. Along with him is his two children, two young children, I think they're like nine and seven. boy and a girl, his wife and and company on because she was back in California, three or four months pregnant with their third child.

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And he was a very well renowned physician professor and like Astro physiology, and so forth. His father was a very

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established or well known physician in Manhattan. In all this is happening on Father's Day. Here, here's a father to father to be an a son

13 54:00

and a father losing his son. Like how much more fucked up can you get? Like, and again, it's not what took place. It's not what I saw. It's the personalization from it. I don't know this guy. He's 40 years old. And it just doesn't make sense. And that's when I really started losing belief. That's where I started losing my faith and in a lot of things, my faith in God, I might, you know, started questioning my abilities. You know, what did I do or what didn't I do could I've done something and it's, you know, to fast forward to this past January. I guess you can call it cyber stalking, but I ended up locating his wife and and I called her and And the first thing that ever month after I told her who I was, we had to go out and play real phone tag initially, but when she called me, I explained to her who I was. And she goes, Do you have PTSD? And I said, Yes, I do. So I've had it for probably about 22 years. And I really don't know why I'm calling you. Other than to let you know that your husband died peacefully. And that I was there with him. And we did everything that we possibly could. And we went into great detail that I mean, she was asking me, because there was some, she had a good understanding of what took place. How much damage was done, or how much injury with the extent of his injuries were. And I wasn't forthcoming initially, until she said something. And then I said, Do you want me to tell you and she's like, just, you know, yeah, let me know everything. And, you know, obviously, because she was a physician, obviously, she knew about all the medical stuff. But talking to her was like, a weight off my shoulders. She had texted me, maybe like a month after a conversation, thank you, me, thanking me for being there for her husband. And, you know, that meant the world to her and her children appreciate everything that I that I did, and are glad to know that, you know, somebody who is there with them, you know, reached out and, you know, I guess, put their mind at ease for for lack of better words. So that was that was probably the most, I would say the most significant incident that had taken place, which most people who know me would think that 911 was, was going to be the most impactful. Which, you know, obviously came up the following year. And it did, I've lost six friends of mine that I worked with in all capacities to work from my department. to or from Port Authority, PD, who were also paramedics and two were firemen that were also paramedics for our hospital. And in each of them, again, the personalization I worked with, with Marissa who was from my department a week before 911 was my first time ever working with him. He was an EMT, really nice guy, just very chill and wife, kids, young. His partner that day, Keith was on the phone with his father at the center and couldn't talk to him, said I'm busy. And that was the last that he heard from key. The irony to it was that Keith didn't know that he died as a paramedic. The week before he had taken his paramedic exam and like the day after he died or was killed, his paramedic card came in the mail.

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One of the firemen Kevin Pfeiffer, whose brother Joe was the battalion chief during the filming of the documentary for the French guys, that was his brother,

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who was the initial BC on the first plane hit the the North Tower and inevitably felt as if that he sent his brother to his dad because he told him to report over to the to the South Tower prior to the collapse. And yeah, 911 had its impact. Amanda again, you know, going through six memorial services followed by six burials upon recovery, part of the recovery it was just I always laugh about this. Because of the ironing. It was the worst day of my life. It was the best day of my life. Obviously, we all know why it was the worst day. You know, my parents didn't know where I was. My wife at that time. She was teaching she's a teacher. She was at work. I had taken her kids to school and came over. As soon as everything started happening. They were calling me tell them to get in the city. They closed all the bridges. I was living in Jersey Finally made it into the city. As I'm crossing over the George Washington Bridge and watching the south tower collapse, I think it's a nuclear device going off and I'm sitting there going, what the fuck am I getting myself into? It was like Escape from New York. You know, like that old movie, it was like, Snake click Plissken like, sit there go where the fuck a snake. It was quiet. You couldn't hear shit. Except for the fighter pot, you know, the fighter planes buzzing around every once in a while. But it was 70 degrees, not a cloud in the sky. And it was a picture perfect day. So that was like the best day, you know, like, that's what you know, when I say it was the worst day, the best day, it was the best day as far as the most beautiful day that I can remember.

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Temperature wise, and the feeling of being there. And then again, it's like, there was no asshole left in New York, or in New York City.

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Everybody was nice. Everybody was doing whatever they could for another. You know, there weren't any horns being you know, blown. As somebody was walking across the street in their way, there was nobody saying fuck eath anybody who just the whole world like kind of came together. It every time they stepped at Ground Zero, you know, over the next guy has only weeks. The roar of applause or applaud that you would get from people just standing there and thanking you and just wanting to be there for you. It was it was truly amazing. I remember coming home from work one day, and it was it was up in Washington Heights and there was a memorial that they have right outside one of the Parks Board trying to park in all the candles and vigils were set up there. And I'm driving and I'm gonna have my uniform on, I'm in my car, my private car, or personal programming. And some guy like walks in front of my car, and like stops. And like, just looks at me, like, I'm thinking or he's gonna pull a gun and just shoot me. Like, he looks at me, he points a finger at me and he gives me a thumbs up and he like slaps his heart like Thank you. He goes, thank you. And I just stood there and I just met the traffic and I'm crying for no reason I'm just crying. You know, it's it was that moment where you start realizing Okay, there is some good that comes from this. I don't know what it is. But, you know, that appreciation you get from somebody who actually took the time to say thank you, you

know, without even knowing me without knowing what I've gone through or went through and so forth. So, so 911 was obviously you know, had its impact on me. And it was thereafter I started really having a lot of memories. Flashbacks. agitation, the hyper vigilance staring in the sky it every fucking plane that flies by not think it's going to crash that just looking at it, watching it just trail off every time and I love flying, I would get on a plane, I wouldn't have any issues whatsoever, I wouldn't look to my left would look to my right or anything like that. I'm not looking to see if there's any, you know, some ethnic person, you know, any Arabs on the plane thinking that they're gonna crash the plane, none of that. I you know, it was fine. It was just when I see a plane, I'd always like just stop and I'd be frozen in time. A three months after 911 I ended up separating from my, my wife. I think, you know, on a couple of different levels, I think it wasn't so much that we were meant to be. It wasn't like, you know, it was it was amicable when it came down to it. However, I remember after coming back from ground zero, and I remember being in one of the D mat tents, and there's like bagfuls of letters and posters from kids from all over the world. And I'm sitting there reading these posters and pictures and stuff. And they're so brutally honest. You know, these kids are like 456 years old. Dear Mr. Policeman, I hope you didn't get killed or Dear Mr. Fireman. I hope you didn't lose any legs or so forth. But the pictures of than drawing, and is just like amazing in yet obviously, it was emotional. And I go home, I told my wife, and she's like, I don't understand why you go down there. Like, I feel like Why do you kill yourself to go down there? It was at that point where I said, I actually feel more at home down there than I do in my own house. I think that was like the straw that broke the camel's back. So we ended up separating and divorce like six months later. And then it really started looking into what do I want to do for the rest of my career. You know, my parents were snowbirds down in, in Florida. So I had come down here, I looked into it. I had initially done it, but my wife at the time, didn't want to go down there. I had applied to the Fire Academy was a two year process or a two year waiting list. Unbeknownst to me, I had got accepted. But because I had moved, they never got the notification. So when I started calling and finding out things and getting further information, they said yeah, you can come down anytime and start the next class. I was like, okay, so I had obviously make some decisions and so forth. And this is 2004. And during that time, one of my buddies that I worked with, he was a medic. While I was a volunteer, EMT was a real real cool guy. Tom pantry and is a former Army 82nd airborne usually into triathlons. Funny guy, like really comical. And he had this you know, obviously it's kind of hard to see but he had this this look on his face, like almost like his eyes would raise as wide as possible and pucker up his lips like in amazement or bewilderment type thing that when he would make a joke or something just you had to see it. He came down with developed a brain tumor, cancers brain tumor, and it was removed and he went to remission. Don't Great. His paramedic with me in Jersey, but he also became a police officer Mount Vernon married and had to his two boys. Thomas Jr. and Nicholas and boys were around nine months 10 months. And his tumor came back. And it started to Mets metastasized throughout his his spinal cord. And I think it was like the latter part I know is in the winter. I can't remember if it was like December, January, I'd gone to the hospital to see him. And he was coherent and stuff a little you know, slow to respond, but any communication wise. Maybe like two weeks later, I came back to see him couldn't speak. couldn't say anything. Look at you. His wife was like, you know, like, can you please try to get him to eat something or to like Italian ice just to get something? No. It's totally you know, like I'm sitting here trying to get him and he wouldn't open up his mouth so I'm like, You know what the fuck do I do? Like I'm centered Oh come on, Tom. I go. Let's do the airplane. You know I did this with my kids at work you know maybe to work with Tom like month off your comes the airplane open up your fucking bathroom with the airplane it and he opened up his mouth. Yeah, like I put it as a good rule I get it. He's like looking at me with that look on his face with his eyes open his lips pocket like that. You know, like you motherfucker look it I knew he was in there. You know, I

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knew Tom was in there. And you know, he passed away two weeks later. And it's just like, fuck, like, why the fuck is this happening? Like, and again, I'm like, going from you know, incident to incident incident.

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I think I'm doing the right thing. I think you know, I'd gone through EAP after 911 i You know, I have a new outlook or I thought I had a new outlook on my

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behavior and I was thinking I thought things were okay. And got that. Not having faith and really losing my faith in everything.

 1:10:00

You know, like my psychiatrist says, it's almost like, like survivor's guilt. He goes, You know, I understand the 911 He goes, but like, you almost wish it was you rather than that, like your life isn't as meaningful as theirs. And it's true. It's like, you know, like, I wasn't married, or divorced, or I didn't have any children when the incident happened with the gentleman in Starbucks. I didn't have any, you know, as my niece, you know, in reference to the little girl like the why them and not make, like their life seem to have more impact or their life seem to be more important than my. And I realized that I'm just like, my self esteem, my faith, all this stuff was like happening without my control. You know, we're, then again, I didn't think I had an issue. My mom ended up passing away. I guess it went a little too, to Florida advance. So after Tom had passed away that summer, I ended up going to Florida to the Fire Academy. I was able to still maintain my employment in the city. I was going back and forth. From Florida to New York. I worked in the weekends. And went to the academy Monday through Friday, down in Florida. And I was living at my parents place there legally. So there were snowbirds. So like over the summer, they, they weren't there. So I lived in the retirement community of Delray Beach, full of my fellow Jews from New York, who were just constantly trying to fix me up with their, you know, their granddaughters or daughters or divorced daughters and stuff. And it was, like a nightmare. But I made it through the academy. During that time, my mom had been suffering for the past eight years of a neurological disorder called cortical basal ganglionic degeneration, which basically, it's the Parkinsonian family, and it's basically a degenerative process, similar to Lou Gehrig's disease. But without pain. She slowly lost the ability to speak, or speech slurred and lost her ability to speak, became neurological deficit on her left side. And she basically was overcoming her. And that summer, she made the decision on her 50th anniversary, that when it got to the point that she could no longer communicate with her hands, that she wanted to stop her feedings. She was getting fed through a feeding tube. And it's funny or ironic that when this took place, it was my parents anniversary is June 27. and I were all in town in Albany for the anniversary. And that week, my father called me and said to me, because hey, do you ever see this movie Field of Dreams? And I'm like, yeah, he's like, that's an awesome, he goes out. It's an awesome movie. Because I just slept for the first time. He never knew that. That movie

always reminded me of my father. Because of like I said, when I played baseball, I never played catch with my dad. So at the end of the movie, when he said, you know, Hey, did you have about a catch? You know, it just always tore me up. Which, you know, again, I was, you know, there's that hypersensitivity that was popping through throughout that time. The hypervigilance that hypersensitivity anxieties and all this other stuff was really heightened. I couldn't watch a fucking TV commercial on ASPCA without bawling my eyes out. St. Jude commercial comes on, I'm fucking crying. My wife thinks, you know, my current wife now thinks like, you know, for a long time, she's like, holy shit and cry everything. Like, yeah, I guess I'm just the most in tune to my senses. But at least now I know why. But back then in the field of dreams, I never realized it and when I came home for the anniversary, I went to the garage I found two baseball gloves and a baseball bat. Went out to the backyard with my dad. And they said he did have better catch. And he started bawling. And obviously I did too, for the first time in my life, I had a catch with my dad. And I did really, you know, obviously at that point that it was only going to be a little over a year later that he passed away. My mom ended up passing away the night that I was supposed to graduate from the Fire Academy. She probably succumb to the neurological process. I was there when she passed. And it was okay. It was she made a decision. She lived her life to actually control her life to the very end. And she had her say, and, you know, it was peaceful. I wasn't emotional initially when it happened. Because it was like quality versus quantity of life. Like I would never want my mom to suffer. Like, you know, I would never wish that, that she would die. I just want her to be at peace. And then when she passed, it was like it was okay. And I don't know if it was because it was becoming so numb to death. And I still was questioning everything, not having that faith. But I think like at that time, the only faith I had was that my mother wisdom was in heaven when she was at peace that the only faith that I really had, at that time, everything else was it just wasn't there. You know, finally, you know, I graduated from the academy got a job right off the bat, like three months after the Academy with a small department Hallandale Beach in and I was only there for four months until Fort Lauderdale gave me the call and jumped on it. And been there ever since I just celebrated my 18 years. Unfortunately, right after I think it was I got to shift my like July of 2005. In October, I think it was Hurricane Wilma that was coming our way. And I went into work for overtime prior to my shift, not their half hour and my brother calls me tells me that like my father just passed. And evidently, he was having I know us having some discomfort earlier that week went to the hospital, he said that he had like some sort of muscle strains ended up going back a second time. They didn't find out anything was levels were normal, and so forth. And we just think that he was, you know, evolving over those days. And then finally, you know, that Sunday night, he just dropped that. Unfortunately, he did this in front of his new girlfriend that he just moved in with. And while this happened, she ends up having a heart attack watching and having a bit of a stent put in a couple of days later, while we're preparing for his funeral. My brothers and I were joking around about it because it's like, and my mother probably saw what was going on didn't like, you know what, you know, enough, you're coming, you're coming up here. And that was, you know, again, it was a sudden thing, you know, I had both experiences, I had the the drawn out experience with my mom and I had the sudden death with my dad. They both suck. But no regrets. You know, like, like, I had those moments with my with my both my mom and my dad, you know, before they passed you know, that catch? You know, that? Didn't know that. That was going to be one of the last things I played golf with my dad, you know, prior, he met my wife and her two children rate when we got engaged, which was a month before he passed. So, you know, there were some things that you know, that I was happy that that I had that opportunity.



1:19:43

And I think that was like the the end of my traumatic incidents. So for like 97 to 2005 All these things were taking place. Meanwhile, you know, meet my wife in 2000 Really 2004 2005 the beginning 2005 We started dating, right when I got hired with Fort Lauderdale. And it moved pretty fast. And she had two children, she was just coming off from divorce. And, you know, she had her history from abusive marriage. You know, she was absolutely beautiful, or she is absolutely beautiful. To the point where it's like, you know, my friends would be like, you're totally kicking outside your area coverage, like, what is she seeing. And for a long time, I was like, I have no clue. But we started having some issues, we started having some, you know, little fights here and there. But I was starting to have more aggression, I was starting to have more outbursts. To the point where I was having like these see red moments. Here, like, she would say something to me, and I just fly off the fucking handle. And I do stupid shit. Like, I grab a knife. And I'd slam it down on the table. You know, I would just, I can't even explain to the things that I've done. Not because I'm embarrassed. I mean, I could tell you, I called her every name of the book, I degraded her, I've said some shit to her that I was gonna be the end of being the mother of my children. And she's still standing there. She's still there. And to this day, and we split up for a while. You know, right after my dad had passed away, she became pregnant with our daughter, or 16 year old. And after my daughter was born in 2006, maybe like a year later, we ended up splitting up for six months to a year because of my, you know, erratic behavior, and aggression and explosive behavior. And I had seen a psychiatrist, I started going through therapy, and my psychiatrist said that I had what's called intermittent explosive disorder for AMD. Which he said he wasn't really quite sure, because a lot of the cases have had previous traumatic incidents, structural trauma. So he says, you know, but the thing is that it's intermittent. It's only happens here and there. So I can control it never happened at work and never had any kind of outbursts and never had any incidents at work. So he's been at home. So I didn't really start believing so much that it was you know, that this intermittent explosive disorder, we're still having, we got back together and things were good. It's like, kind of like, you know, you manage it for a while, you know, things are good. You think things are in the past, and they're not, they're just on the backburner, they really haven't gotten resolved. We've never gone to marriage counseling, and we just think things are gonna get better in time. And, you know, it's just a phase and then it's, you know, shit started, you know, reread up again. You know, the anger, the punching the walls, throwing things, breaking things, you know, hitting hitting myself, like, like, seriously smack in my head, like hitting my head, punching my head. Like, to the point where like, I'm like praying that like God, let me just have some sort of a fucking tumor. Let me have a brain tumor, let's make the behave this way. Where maybe if I can hit my head, so hard that I'll get my, you know, have made myself have a brain bleed. Maybe, like, just I just want to die. I don't want to be here anymore. I just, I can't do this anymore. You know, but the father of three children, you know, her two children, when they're my children, their father is not in in detection. They're my children. And I'm like a father to them. Or I am their father and this supposed to be this strong husband, this fireman, this paramedic person who who? who's devoted his life to serving others and truly gets a ton of gratitude for being there for someone else's time of need. And I thought I would immerse myself in doing that if I can make other people happy if I can make other people feel like they've been taken care of that it's going to make me feel good. That's going to make all this shit go away. And it doesn't, you know, it's kind of like, you know, the proverbial flight attendant says, you know, before you put the oxygen mask on others, put it on yourself. First, you got to take care of yourself and pretty take care of others. I totally wasn't doing that I was doing for everybody else. Because I thought that was what I was supposed to do. That's what I've convinced myself. Finally, like 2011 was January's Martin Luther King Day, both days, kids were up from school, but they're at their grandparents, Elizabeth was, was pregnant with our youngest, like four months pregnant. And we got into some sort of a stupid argument. And I had a drum stand because I was learning how to play the snare drum for the pipes and drum

ban. And I like grabbed the drum standard. And I was like, God, I just want to bash your fucking head. And she got scared. And she started to leave. And our bedroom was on the second floor. And I didn't want her to leave, like I'm grabbing her arm because I just I just didn't want her to leave me. And she slips and she falls down the stairs. And I'm just like, like, Please don't leave me just please don't leave me. And she ended up leaving, returns with two police officers. And they just told me that they just, you know, have some self preservation just let her get some clothes. And you guys can resolve this tomorrow and so forth and don't do goddamn thing about it. And which at that point, they should have arrested me. So the next day, she comes home with the kids and you know, everything's okay. But unbeknownst to me, she had filed for a restraining order will because of that the sergeant had required the police officers that did the first clothing withdrawal or clear removal to write up their report got sent up to the state attorney's office because she's pregnant, it automatically becomes a felony or an aggravated battery. So she wants me to do so there. You know, I talked to the police and so forth and I turned myself and so I ended up turning myself in availed myself out like the next day after the court appearance. The judge was kind of lacks a daisy but he's like I don't even know why you're arrested. He goes there's so many holes in the story and so forth. And I don't know what's going on here to me this is my first time we got arrested only times got arrested. But I'm still it's still not clicking as far as what's going on. My wife is there in court making sure that like while she wanted for me to get help. She just want to be needing to be accountable for my my actions and wanting me to get help. And I'm thinking all along the she's out for for blood. There's no contact the king can't talk to her can't text her nothing. I think she's come you know, I moved in with some friends from work and there's no contact, I haven't seen my my daughter or auntie kids. For months, I had to go through family court to get supervised visitation finally, just with my daughter, they wouldn't let me to see the other two. And then thereafter, finally, after going through, like the anger management, therapy, and all that stuff that they allow me to, to have visitation with my daughter. But unfortunately the day that that had taken place was on June 27.



1:29:15

And again as my parents anniversary and I'm in court and my attorney is literally ripping my wife a new asshole by asking her all these stupid questions in regards to whether or not the the father of my daughter or the father of the unborn child and stuff. And you know, in Florida, the only way of knowing definitively is by a blood test. So when he asked me, am I the father? She says, Yes, I assume so. And he starts like ripping into it because she doesn't want to perjured herself by saying something that he shouldn't come even come back and say, Oh, you're lying because you get a blood test. So she's emotional. She's full term pregnant. I'm sitting there watching her just get berated by my attorney till finally I'm like mouthing to her, relax. And I turned my attorney. I said, That's it. I'm done. I said, I plead guilty. Because this isn't the criminal case. I said, don't give a shit. I said enough of this badgering? I said, I don't want. You can't do this to her. This isn't what I want. I said, I did this. I battered her. Because you didn't you didn't beat her. I said, No, I put my hand on her. I grabbed her arm. I don't care what will how it is I said, but that's what I did. Well, because the justice system is perfect. Unbeknownst to me, four months earlier, the State Attorney's Office had asked my attorney if I would consider pleading no contest entering an agreement to go into a batteries intervention program for six months now the charges dropped in my attorney never told me. Two weeks after June 27, my son was born. I wasn't there for my son, Ward. So I wasn't there for Elizabeth. My attorney NIT and ever told me even two weeks after he was born. That's when I found out that I had a son. When I finally had my daughter for visitation, she was on the phone with my wife. And she's reading her at least once a good night story, or bedtime story. And my wife's like I

get here say just go spend time with daddy. She's like, it's your time with daddy. You know, go have fun. And she's like, No, mommy, I want you to tell me a bedtime story. She goes no, because she's afraid that I'm gonna sit there say oh, she talks to my daughter all the time. So finally, you know, a great the, the no contact by taking the phone and I said to Elizabeth go, Hey, it's okay. Just talk to her and let him tell her story. She's like, okay, she's like, how are you? I said, I'm okay. I said, I'm so sorry for all this. I said, you know, I have a six page letter that I wrote you would it be okay? If I gave it to Paulina. She's like, Call me later. So I ended up calling her and we were on the phone for a couple hours. And I read her the letter how and I took accountability for for my actions and what had taken place. It was at that time, at that time I psychiatrist those scene started to talk to me more about PTSD. And started to think that I had more of like a chemical imbalance because of all the previous trauma that I endured. So they put me on some antidepressants. It changed over time. And it seemed to manage for the most part the like the anger the mood stabilizer health. The Depression part did. And I just started you know, still having these anger moments in depressive moments. And it was like a roller coaster ride. It was the hyper vigilance, being at work coming home, zoning out watching TV, not, you know, distancing myself from everybody in the house. You know, being an asshole just because you're sitting there the dishes in the sink, and nobody's taking the time to clean number a bitch and at the kids. Kids don't want anything to do with me. The kids think that this is their fault, because like, Why is dad mad at us? Why did we do it? I've just this miserable fuck. And every time I would get upset or I get mad, I get you know, it would be a cycle. It'd be like I yell, I you know, I calm down, I'm happy. And then inside of internalizing this, and I'm depressed, I'm ashamed of my actions, and I get even more depressed. And then you repeat. Do it again. And it gets worse. I'm ashamed of myself. I'm isolating myself. I'm more depressed. Repeat. And it just keeps going. Until finally last year, I just, I had enough. I got into it with my wife over something stupid. I mean, most of this shit is stupid. But like I threw out a cup of hers by accident. Didn't you realize it? I didn't think I did it. But then I was like, I went in the garbage. I found it. And they were making fun of it. It wasn't the but I was taking it like personally and and I was like if they walked upstairs, like I was checked out. And I was like, God, I'm just I'm gonna go blow my fucking brains apart. When I went upstairs in my room, I grabbed my gun case. And I said, Just do it, just do it. It only be for a second. And I grabbed my gun case, I open up my gun. And I and I put the clip in. And I rack it like three times, you know, as a racket, you know, obviously, after the first time they bought coming out of the chamber, like did it just because I wanted her to hear. I wanted her to hear what was common. And put it in my mouth. And she like, just as I put in my mouth, she like walks in the room. And I like quickly took it and she's like, What, are you going to shoot me? And I was like, No, it's just like cleaning my gun. I don't know what the fuck is stupid. Chris takes the kids and she leaves. In Am I you know, half hour later, my brothers both call me. They're like, What the fuck are you doing? And I was like, you know, I kind of made light of it. I'm like, Dude, I said, when you get upset, I just do busy work. So I went upstairs and I just fucking clean my gun, just obviously didn't buy it. And my oldest brother said to me and this is this is Woodhead. And, you know, it was that exact moment that I realized I'm gonna kill myself. Eventually, I'm gonna kill myself if I don't do something. And he said to me, because I don't know what you're trying to prove. Or who you're trying to prove it to? He goes, but you need to get fucking hell he goes, you need intensive. He goes, I'm not talking about go talk to somebody once a week. He goes, I'm talking about go away. In fucking get help. He said you should kill yourself. Because Are you going to do something? He said, I don't even want to say. And he was right. And I like I just sat there. And I was like, I'm like, What the fuck am I what am I doing? I am like destroying my marriage. I'm destroying my kids. My kids hate me. I see the personality different, you know, the changes in them. My relationship with my son, my oldest son sucks. My middle daughter, my youngest daughter thinks I don't even know she's scared of me. My oldest daughter thinks I don't even care for her as a daughter. And my little one, will I try not to fuck up? You know, I'm doing just

that. Like, I'm thinking like, they'd be better off without me. But then you'd say to yourself, you don't want to fuck your kids up any more. You're going to if you do. And it was like, it was like a hard choice. It was like, you know, I used to tell, you know, go on through enough funerals, you know, suicides where I'd say that they're cowards. And, you know, and I've regretted saying those words. I've regretted saying that. Because until you're there until you know what it feels like to just, you just want it to stop. You don't want to die. You just want all the shit that comes along with it that you've gone through. You just want to stop you just want those. Those things that are going on in your head those thoughts. There's the way you feel you just wanted to stop. And you know, I didn't know what to do. So are you at work I want to my my boss, my battalion chief friends with he's part of the peer support. He had, you know, obviously connection for Florida House, or FET health in Deerfield Beach, which has a program called shatterproof and it's for first responders military,



1:39:10

which they're all housed together. And they're like kind of a little bit on like the cutting edge of psychiatry and dealing with PTSD, depression, addiction and so forth. So he said, you know, I'll make a call and he did and they were willing to come get me write that in there. But I had, I needed a couple of days because obviously I had to get I was getting an apartment. Just so I could separate myself from the kids and Elizabeth while I go through all this. So I ended up getting checked into the shatterproof you have to spend a couple of days and what I refer to as Gen pop, which Elizabeth didn't like when I called it that where you're amongst both The first responders as well as the anybody else, which was it was kind of like going to jail a little bit, you know, the routine and so forth. But fortunately, I got roomed with a guy who just come in that day from Indiana who's a police officer, my age, and of having like, literally almost like the same mental health issues. We both didn't have any addictions, which is actually surprising, you know, in the mental health world, dealing with PTSD that a lot of times, you know, comes along with other types of issues. You know, I'm not a big drinker at that store, no drugs. And we hit it off like we ended up becoming like Rooney's, you know, what you will we got moved over to, to shatterproof housing, we both lucked out, we got like, most people had four people total and apartment, we only had one bedroom. So it's just the two of us. We just hit it off, it was incredible. But that program saved my life. It it opened up my mind in ways that I couldn't imagine, you know, for the longest time for those 22 years that I've been dealing with this shit. You know, the biggest question that you ask is why? And I learned right off the bat, why is a deadly question. Because why you don't get an answer, you don't get an answer you you're there isn't an answer, you're gonna you're going to hear because that wildly comes from one place. And that's that higher being, you know, whatever your faith is, or your religious beliefs, God, Buddha, whoever. You're the only ones that have the answer for you. And so you get there, you're not going to know why. But you're not going to like the answer. And it really doesn't do you any good to know the answer. It doesn't change anything. What changes is you in order to overcome all the stuff that you've gone through? Well, shatterproof offered me all these types of therapies. The first thing they did was they did a neuro mapping or brain mapping, which shows like their frequencies and your brainwaves. And it shows you where trauma occurs in your brain where the hypervigilance, anxiety, depression, all this stuff. And it's all based on like colors which are interferes with your brainwaves. And for the first time, I could actually see from a medical standpoint where my brain was affected, I can actually visually see that. This is where my hypervigilance comes from this is where the trauma is in the hand how heightened that is. So it doesn't excuse the behavior. It just helps me to understand I'm just stop making this shit up and not going crazy. I have some sort of validation. And again, it I don't use it to go to my wife and say here, look at this. This is why I'm like this. No, but it's

to say while the shit that I went through or a one through, just like she's going through, she's got her own traumas. The kids have their own traumas, they haven't gone through the therapy that I've gone through, they're getting there. But because of my traumas and my actions have cause trauma to them. But I at least I could save for me, okay, I have a better understanding of where it came from and what it did to be now let's get on the path to fix it. Or to to help get me on a path to normality went through one on one therapy did group therapy. I did art therapy. But did yoga. Neurofeedback, which is like kind of like a very small scale of like, shock treatment, just like little impulses to kind of rearrange those those brainwaves. And to get that hyper vigilance and that depression, isolation, all those stuff and a nerve in a very normal pathway. It's that plasticity, that that's amazing about our brain, that our brain can be conditioned and can be really conditioned to be in a normal, normal range and it's Stay there, and to continue with the things that are going to help keep you healthy, and to maintain that healthy lifestyle and healthy brain lifestyle as well. I ended up doing, you know, the use of yoga breath work, breathing techniques. Then I finally found the game changer. And that was IV ketamine. And they see that, you know, like, I laugh about it, it's like, like, you get high, it's gonna help. No, it has nothing to do about the, the getting high part. It's just that I realized in talking to people that had gone through the program, they said, you need to submit yourself and be submissive to anything and everything they throw out. Because until you find that one thing, you might overlook it and that might be the one that does it for you. Because it is a trial and error, trying to figure out what works for you. And I had six sessions, well it was there and the they were going good until like the fourth session, the fourth session, I had this horrible session. Now I know ketamine. Here the whole idea behind the ketamine is that the the normal antidepressants, the serotonin reuptake usually work on your neurotransmitters like the dopamine in order, norepinephrine and serotonin. Whereas the ketamine usually works on other types of neurotransmitters, that helps to kind of increase the synapses or the connectivity. In my antidepressants were the mood stabiliser was was doing what it should be, but it was the antidepressant that wasn't working. So I think it was becoming resistant to it. So the ketamine was an option to see if you can kind of pick up on the other neurotransmitters

 James Geering 1:47:16

just quickly, was it? Were they doing the counseling with the ketamine or was it just the infusion aneurysm?

 1:47:22

So what they did was they did a neuro stimulation treatment prior to that was to stimulate your vagus nerve to kind of help you relax. And then during the actual session, they just put you through the side, they didn't do any kind of counseling with you while you were there. I listen to like music or whatever, but they they put. But the one my last session, I did have somebody that was there that was talking to me, and and I think they did it because after my fourth session, I really had a bad experience. Ketamine is not good for or they think that it's not good for those that have anxiety, that it can actually exacerbate that that angst, anxiety and anxiousness. In which it does, but I can manage it. Like I think I always say that there's three people there, there's me going through it, there's me, you know, seeing myself go through it. And then there's me who's talking myself off the ledge, like I can actually sit there. And when I know that I'm getting anxious, I can say, okay, Jason, just relax, take a deep breath, you got this, you're in control, and I can control myself and I'm good with it. But what it does is it really

just like it just opens your mind up. And whatever thought I want to think of I can go there immediately. And not have a real emotional response in a negative way they get if I want to think about like my parents. Were even there times where I thought about the traumas that I've seen, it never really stimulated any kind of emotional response and ever got like upset like, I just, I felt like at peace with it. But that fourth session, it's like I felt like I opened up Pandora's box. And just all that shit came rushing out. And I felt like I felt nauseous. I felt like I was losing control. I felt like I was going into this black hole of the end. Like I was gonna go into this hole and I was never coming out it just it was that scary. And I was like frightened to go back for my fit, but I'm like, okay, maybe this is what how the processes and I talked to my therapist explained that sometimes it does happen because sometimes it taps into something that you know, for reasons unknown, maybe it is. You go see how the fifth in the fifth I came out and I was I was on cloud nine. Like, I just I felt good. Like, it was like in 20 years of like going in front of the mirror. And whether saying to myself, you know, God, you're fat, you need to lose weight or yours so fucked up. Like, I never I used it as like negative motivation to lose weight and stuff, I never looked at myself and said, Wow, they did a review that hadn't seen you in 22 years, like, I felt really good, I was happy. And it since then, you know, like, I've been going now like, once I was doing it once a month for a little while, and now I'm doing like, once every two months. And there are times where after like those two months, you know, I kind of feel a little bit not depressed, I just like I feel a little in a rut. And I go and I go through the session, and it's like, I'm just like, re energized. You know, just, I feel very, it sounds corny, but I feel very vibrant. And it's just like, nothing can stop me. I feel it feel good. And I'm in a good place. And along with that, I just, you know, I stick to the routine of you know, my therapy. Your I read a lot, you know, as far as you know, it's like, psychological stuff, you know, like mindfulness, I'm very into meditation. I do. Like, every night I go to bed, I meditate. And I feel it's just like a great way to end the day. You know, some people feel it's great. And the first thing in the morning to start your day for me, it just I just lay in bed. And I put on this guy, Jason Stephenson is like, he's Australian. And I go through this sleep meditation with him, or just put on like brown noise, white noise, whatever. And it just, I chill. I do my own little breathing work. And it helps it just makes things better.

 James Geering 1:52:07

Well, yeah, no, I was gonna say, Well, firstly, thank you, because I think I've only asked about two questions. So the editing is gonna be amazing. And anyone that hates my voice, they're probably gonna love this episode as well.

 1:52:19

Yeah, anyone anyone who knows me is gonna sit there gone. Oh, he got a quarter. He just

 James Geering 1:52:25

threw No, but it was beautiful. Because you let us exam I was looking at my piece of paper. And it's like, we've gone all the way through the list of what I would have asked you anyway. But I do want to circle around a couple of parts. The aggression, anger element is something that isn't really discussed that much. We talk a lot about, you know, depression, suicide, you know, those kinds of things. But I think a lot of ours manifests in anger. And I help us to remember,

though, dan de Grice, who's one of the absolute gurus in firefighter mental health, we were comparing notes on our road rage. And, you know, again, I have never physically manhandled someone in the car. But what goes through my head, and it's a lot better now. But certainly when I was on shift, you know, you've seen the horrible things that we've seen. And then you watch someone drive like an asshole, which kind of circles back to our, you know, opening conversation. I see that person sitting on the curb sobbing in fucking self pity after they've wiped out minivan full of kids and parents, and it's too late, then. You know what I mean? So to me, I'm projecting a result of doom and gloom. And I want to stop that from happening. So I want to grab that person through their fucking windshield, and slam their face into the curb until they cease to be a danger to anyone. Is that actually a good social reaction to that? Absolutely not. We have people that we pay to wear uniforms that take care of those kinds of people. But that anger is very much it, you know. So I think that's an important thing. And there's two types of people in the fire service. The people that should never have been hired in the first place, who are pieces of shit and happen to get through. I'm not talking about them. But the people that we have, that we work alongside that became alcoholics that became abusive that turned into Dex, you ask, okay, what were they like on the program during probation this first couple of years? Were they assholes? If the answer is no, a lot of these things that we're talking about today, are a combination of all these things, a lot of which are contributed to by the job. So I had a lawyer, Lisa, who lay on a great conversation, but she started defending first responders with some of these charges, including, you know, domestic abuse and things like that. There is 100% as you put your hand on your heart, about your own situation, a victim in these cases, but the mental health element is a valid part of the defense of the responder. will it save that person's marriage? Maybe Maybe not, you know, but If we're not taking into the fact that, you know, same with our men and women in the military, that our service has a cost. And some of us are extremely fortunate to navigate our career and never have any issues, but some of us aren't. And that person who was a rock star when you're in previous school, probie school, is now drinking himself into oblivion and belligerent and aggressive that he didn't used to be like that. And this is what we've got to have this conversation as well. So firstly, I want to thank you for that insight. Because I think it's very important. You know, we had this thing about the unions always protect the assholes. Sometimes, yes, but sometimes those people are worth fighting for. I agree. 100%. The other thing that was extremely important is you talked about the feeling of being a burden to your family. And this is something that again, I didn't have this epiphany eight years ago, I've learned this through all my amazing guests. But you have led us through childhood trauma in a sexual abuse and some other areas, then your the things that you actually saw that feeling there, the inability to save now, is it progressing through in the first responder professions, you're adding sleep deprivation, you know, and now you've got all these compounding elements that are contributing to the Miss wiring of the brain. And obviously, the the feeling of being a burden and the aggression of totally interrelated with this whole perfect storm of negative contributing factors. But I wish that more people understood that because as you touched on, and I've talked about this, and I think you and I have chatted about this, that suicide is selfish, is cowardly conversation is so ignorant. Now, I know that, you know, I was thinking the same thing, 10 years ago, myself, but when you understand that, through this perfect storm of all these negative things on address childhood trauma, you know, organizational stress, alcohol to decompress, which actually fucks up your sleep, sleep deprivation at work force, mandatories, etc, etc, etc, the brain becomes so miswired, that you've got a first responder who has signed on a piece of paper that they will die for a complete stranger, that now their brain is lying to them, and they have them thinking that they are a burden to their family, that that human being truly believes that their newborn child and the woman that they fell madly in love with will actually be better off. If they're dead. That needs to be on our posters. Not not another phone number, you know, I mean, you can have

that as a resource. But that needs to be if you believe that you are a burden to your family. That is one of the biggest red flags that should be front and center in the in the first responder suicide conversation.



1:57:42

Yeah, absolutely. It's funny, because I was, it's just because as I get older, and I start seeing things a little bit clearer, or maybe, you know, maybe I'm maturing, finally, I realized that Listen, 30%, you know, the statistic of 30% of people in first responders are going to have mental health issues. We know that there's more deaths by suicide than are from line of duty deaths, and that's just the ones that are reported. It's not going to happen, everybody. I think that there is a lot of variables that play a role into this, I think a lot of it is for some of it has to do backgrounds. Maybe I had, you know, I was susceptible to PTSD. Maybe somebody who went through the exact same experience that I have, maybe had a different background might not be it might not have developed it or might. We don't know, specifically what it is. And I really don't care, because that's the why. And like I said before, the wind doesn't matter. It's like, you know, yeah, you look at my background, and you say that this is, you know, okay, I could see some of the red flags. And maybe this is where we can kind of pinpoint it, but it doesn't matter. It's because of recognizing and coming to the understanding of, okay, you've accepted it, and you realize that you have a problem. That's the hardest part is taking action and taking responsibility, you know, in saying, I have a problem and wanting help. And that's, to me, that's the hardest part, you know, and I said, you know, I've said to people, there was one officer development class that we were running, and somebody that I worked with, it said something like, Well, do you feel as if that you know, they just keep you know, you know, throwing down you're throwing, pushing our face, all this mental health, awareness. It's like shoving it down our throats. Do you feel you know, there's so much like every time you look around, somebody's talking about mental health and so forth. I'm like, you know, I can understand where there's been a lot of inflammation. And there's been a, maybe a push in mental health. I said, but Jeff has to say to yourself, why is that? I said, because there's people that are killing themselves, just fellow brothers and sisters that are out there killing themselves. And I know what it feels like to want to be that person who kills himself. We said, because I was there. I said, I might not have pulled the trigger. I said, but something stopped me. I said, and I think it wasn't my wife opening up the door. I think it was at that point that I actually had some sort of, I know better, that this is not what I want. Whether it's it's I'm scared to die or what something stopped me from doing it. And I remember having a dream. Last year after I got that a shatterproof that I had a fight with my dad, like a physical fight confrontation. And I remember pulling a gun, and I was going to shoot him. And instead, I twisted the gun around. In it, it clicked, they actually pulled the trigger. And there was nothing in the chamber there was the gun wasn't even loaded. But I woke up like, like, cold sweat. And I'm sitting there breathing heavy. And I like literally was scared. shitless like this was like the worst dream. But it was at that moment, I realized that you know what, like, I woke up, like, I'm happy. It's okay, I'm still on the lie. Because Had that been reality back when I put my gun in my mouth. And I actually pulled that trigger. That's it lights up for me. And now I've left the burden on my family. Suppose that you know, the family that I love, you know, I caused this. It's there's no simple answer. There's, you know, the biggest thing for me is that my wife is the same. And now that I have my faith in God, I've always said this to her. That, you know, she'll say, What has God done to me to put me through all this, or he's tested her, you know, she's got she, my wife has leukemia.



2:02:39

And she's managing it quite well. She's going through a lot in her life. And I owe my life to her. I owe my life to my children.



2:02:55

And I don't know which direction it's going to be. But I only have time. And that time is going to be spent trying to clean up my mess. And to get them in the right direction so that they can overcome the challenges that I gave them, or that I put on them. She's still here with me, it's been 18 years. And I really can't say that if it was any other woman that she would still be here, you probably would have said Sian are Adios, motherfucker, you're on your own. But, and again, I'm not gonna say I don't know why I don't know what she sees. But you know what? She obviously see something, you know, I'm not going to question that. Because that's something precious, that I can only use just to, you know what I'm saying. And sometimes I just, I can't. There will never be enough that I can do for her to make up for what I've done. But for as long as I'm here. And for as long as I have, I'm going to ensure that I do what I can for her. Because that's how much she needs to me. And my children are the same. And it's it's nothing. I don't care what happens to me anymore. It's all about them. And some people will argue and say, Well, you need to care about yourself, oh, I care about myself. I love myself. I love who I am. I love God. I'm happy. I'm in a good place. But I want to spend the rest of my life making sure that other people get right. And to make sure that my family stays right. That's my mission.



James Geering 2:04:53

Beautiful. Well, I think that's a very healing part. I mean, a lot of people that I've had on here that have gone through the crucible that you have one of the healing things for them is actually doing things for others. So, you know, a perfect analogy when I started this podcast transitioned out of my last Fire Department out the the fire service wearing uniform to help the fire service through this medium. My wife supported me, and that was terrifying financially and benefits wise and all that because it was a complete leap of faith, which, as as we speak, you know, some of the sponsorship has kind of dwindled off and we got a dry patch. And then, you know, there's some more on the horizon that I'm gonna step in, but it's it's very insecure way of living your life. But now my wife's in med school halfway through an optometry program, and I'm now able to support her. So this is what a beautiful marriage is about. Just going round as well, to the way the mental health conversation all the time. I think there's a few things to throw out that firstly, the way that it's been addressed, there was a very new topic for us. So sadly, a lot of it has not been done very well, through no fault of anyone's, but it's death by PowerPoint. Here's the stats on you know, double the line of duty deaths. And I would argue that these are all lines do that duty deaths, by the way. You know, we don't talk about addiction, overdose, death by alcoholism, all the things that you would, you know, probably multiply by 10 these numbers, but I think where we need to go is that post traumatic growth conversation, and then that pulls in the naysayers, because to achieve the highest level of performance in sports as a paramedic at three in the morning, doing a right hand search in a two storey, you know, family dwelling, we have shooting we are aiming we are hoping for that flow state and you ask anyone in the sporting world to enter that flow state, you have to have a clear mind. So you have to have 10 years 10,000 reps, you have to have a high level of stress. Well, we have both of those if you're a diligent firefighter, certainly into your career. But if

you've got that Maelstrom in your mind, you're never actually going to have the ability to truly be, you know, a critical thinker in the paramedic side, you know, have your head on a swivel on a fire scene, etc, etc. But also that these traumas can be a strength, if we have processed them, they become a superpower when we're not having that conversation either. As you talked about two identical responders having two different, you know, responses to traumas, well, your childhood is very different to my childhood, you know, and I've been so bloody fortunate that I had some traumatic things happen. I was in a house fire when I was four and a bunch of other things. But by sheer chance, I had equal and opposite some amazing healing things. Through my career, my family literally lived around the dinner table talked and joked and made fun of each other. I grew up around blood and guts because my dad was a equine and small animal vet veterinarian. So we were doing surgery. So the blood and guts were never a big thing. So for each bad, there was a good you know, I've just again, I haven't done anything special. I'm just lucky that that was the case. And I've been in some low place, but never quite as low as the weapon in the hand like a lot of people have. But you have grown from that, you know, your wife has come through, I'm sure your children, you know, have or are going to my son had some really fucking horrible things happen in middle school. And he's, you know, grown from that. It's amazing to watch. So I think that's the takeaway is the service, the giving back to the people that held you up and being that shoulder now for other people being that arm that reaches down because you've been there, but also, from a performance standpoint, understanding that if we normalize these mental health conversations, this isn't a mental health conversation podcast. This is a human being podcast. But lo and behold, 80% these conversations go into the mental health side, because most people have shit that they've gone through. This is what's you know, the human experience. So to kind of add on to what you said, we if we have that post traumatic growth conversation, the same way as I did overcome a back injury, figure out what was wrong in my body, fix it and come back stronger. That is, I think the next step that's really going to normalize it and take away some of the naysayers of people that just either haven't come to terms with their own trauma, or maybe we're fortunate enough to really never been in a dark place.



2:09:32

Yes, absolutely. It I remember when my, my therapist talked to me about post traumatic growth. And he says, you know, it's, it's just a different way of thinking it's realizing that you know, what has happened to you has happened, and, you know, it's not for me, it's never forgetting I'm never like that. Forget how I would say it, but it's like my my brain can't seem to raise the storm. Memories of the images that my eyes have seen, and will never go away, they'll always be there. It just, they don't have an effect on my life negatively. It's, it's, there's a positive. And I use it as a positive, because to talk to other people that, you know, I understand a lot of people are uncomfortable in talking about these types of, you know, mental health issues or addictions and so forth. It's tough. But you know, what, sometimes you have to have these tough discussions. Me, especially as an officer, you know, there are times where I have to have just, you know, tough discussions, but there are discussions that need to be had, because the changes needed, whether it's because somebody's not doing something that they should be as far as the standard operating procedure rules and regs and so forth. Or just, from a personal standpoint, you have an obligation if we really truly, you know, believe in the Brotherhood, or the sisterhood. Because I think for a long time that those words are just use it mostly at funerals. You know, we're all part of the brotherhood and sisterhood at funerals, Hey, brother, your love you, brother, and so forth. But really, that's that's a mindset and also change that that attitude, change that culture to if you truly believe in that brotherhood, then you really owe it to yourself to make sure that you're in there, spreading the word, and truly, make

sure everybody's good. And they you're there to help others and, and if need be, you know, you have to help yourself to that's the, you know, for me, that's the first priority is I'm good, that I feel confident in my abilities to help others.

J James Geering 2:11:55

There's a phrase or a quote, should I say that IVIG was originally attributed to Anne Frank, I don't know if actually is what she said. But it goes, the dad received more flowers in the living because regret is more powerful than gratitude. Others like Mike drum, so that's just it is that we have the ability, whether it's changing the workweek of the firefighters nationally to allow them the rest and recovery, they actually need, you know, whether it's positively putting, you know, I would love to see five counseling sessions as part of that probationary six months, you know, get rid of polygraphs and psych tests, because they do absolutely nothing, take that and budget, their money, put it into, you know, five, six counseling sessions. If you're bringing stuff into the job, which most of us do, you're going to have an opportunity to offload that you're going to normalize the mental health conversation, the front door, and you're going to have a relationship with an individual. So you're not going to get to play EAP Russian Roulette five years into your career.

i 2:12:57

Right? I even think, you know, and I just saw Travis house. I think I told you, I saw him, like a month ago. And that was my first time seeing him or hearing him. And, you know, he he spoke about, you know, like, why don't departments have like SOPs for mental health? Because we have, you know, procedures, like when a hurricane comes, comes into town with those procedures are aware to report who you report and so forth. Why isn't there SOPs for mental health issues? Listen, if you're feeling, you know, in a way or something is going on, these are the SOPs that you need to follow into Listen, is everybody going to adhere to them? Okay, they're guidelines, but at least it puts it out there that we're taking this seriously, in that we are trying to do whatever we can to make sure that when somebody is in need, that they know that there's they're not alone, and that they have an opportunity to get help and the backing, you're not going to get everybody. Unfortunately, it's going to continue but you know what, to me, it's a rather say, too much to say to little until suicide stop until which it's not going to as long as the fire service or first responders military, as long as people are going to be suffering in some way and there are people taking care of those people that are in need. There's always going to be that opportunity for people to suffer mentally. Which is fine, but we need to have the resources available and to make it a to take away that stigma and make it's acceptable to have a problem. And now here's how we deal with the problem is to not make it effective in a detrimental way, or have a detrimental effect on your life. It's a process really is.

J James Geering 2:15:04

Absolutely. Well, we've been chatting for over two hours now. So which is which is good. So I'm sure people listening would love to kind of learn more reach out. So where are the best places for them to do that online?



2:15:21

They can reach me at my, my email, my personal email is Flf are 765 at gmail.com So like FL like Fort Lauderdale Fire Rescue 765 at gmail.com Yeah, I'd love to hear your feedback and responses from people. You know, I would love to you know, if need be, I would love to come and speak in person to whomever it's a group of firefighters, EMS corrections, you name it, that there's something I could do to help another person reach out and and I'll definitely do what I can



James Geering 2:16:09

for Liam. Well, Jason, I want to say thank you so much. I mean, you've led us through from you know, some some childhood events which a lot of people bury down and feel shame about. But the more I've done this podcast, the more that is prevalent especially in our male responders and members of the military, so this is another elephant that we got to you know, address in the room, pull out the shadows and talk about whether it's childhood trauma because you feel unloved as a child simply from a parenting point of view, whether it's sexual abuse from you know, a vicar or a Scoutmaster or a martial arts teacher, you know, that there's, these are the things that we need to talk about as well. But then, you know, leading us through and being vulnerable and transparent about the anger, you know, the impact on your family. It's been invaluable. So I want to thank you so, so much for being so courageous today and telling your story.



2:17:02

You're welcome. And I appreciate you very much for giving me the opportunity. Your, your podcast is amazing, and, and I'm glad you allowed me the opportunity. I hope it does reach out to people and I look forward to hearing more of your podcasts and I can bless you and your family. Appreciate it.