

# Jessie Gould - Episode 771

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## SUMMARY KEYWORDS

started, psychedelics, talking, people, find, felt, spot, knew, veterans, military, trauma, finance, anxiety, thought, absolutely, war, parents, put, person, side

## SPEAKERS

James Geering, Jessie Gould

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 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, Army Ranger combat veteran and the founder of the heroic Hearts project Jesse gold. So this incredible conversation we discuss a host of topics from his original journey into finance, his decision to join the military, traumatic brain injury, his own mental health struggles, finding plant medicine, Ayahuasca, Ibogaine, the inception of his own nonprofit Kagan Gill story, and so much more. Now, before we get 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 and leave a rating. Every five star rating truly does elevate this podcast therefore making it easier for others to find. And this is a free library of fast approaching 800 episodes now. So all I ask in return is that you help share these incredible men or 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 Jesse gold enjoy. Jesse, I want to start by saying thank you so much for taking the time to come on the behind the shield podcast today.

 Jessie Gould 01:40

Thanks so much for having me. I've been following you guys for a little bit because we're doing some pretty interesting stuff. So happy to bring this important topic to your audience.

 James Geering 01:50

Beautiful. And I want to say thank you to Keegan Gill as well. We'll get into his journey and when you guys met but another phenomenal human being.

 01:57

Keegan's a great guy. I'm happy as with many others to be a part of their story and vice versa.

 James Geering 02:05

Absolutely. So where on planet earth are we finding you today?

 02:09


I am actually in New York City Manhattan. For net right now actually just got back from like a month of traveling. So it's nice to be home.

 James Geering 02:19

So I'd love to start the very beginning of your timeline. So tell me where you were born. And tell me a little bit about your family dynamic. what your parents did? How many siblings?

 02:29

Yeah, so a little bit. I guess I wouldn't say unusual nowadays. But parents divorced when I was around three. Born in Santa Fe, New Mexico. My father is still there in New Mexico. My mother moved to Florida. So I kind of grew up both both both places. With my sister who is two years older. Both my sister and father are lawyers. And then my mom was a stay at home. Mom now she does some like customer rental property stuff, though. I mean, never ideal situation. Being child of divorce, but in this situation is probably the best bet. And on the plus side, my sister and I got to grow up in a beautiful beach. And then we had the beautiful mountains of New Mexico. So pretty, pretty diverse there. And then went to college in Cornell University in Ithaca, New York upstate, so got to experience what a real with winter looks like and worked in finance for a little bit. So that was the first time I really lived in New York City, working in investment banking, and then join the military right after working for a little bit. And so was stationed in Savannah, Georgia, became an Army Ranger, first battalion 75th Ranger Regiment in the US. Beautiful Well,

 James Geering 03:55

I want to go all the way back even before you were born. So listening to one of the other podcasts I forget what it was called. I think it was like, shut out podcast. No, it was a gentleman who was a veteran pre gulf war that was interviewing you. And you talked about your grandparents so excuse me, your grandfather's from different sides, both being World War Two veterans but in different capacities. So let's start there as far as the veteran journey.

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Yeah, absolutely. I never really knew that much. It wasn't really talked about my household. I wouldn't call my household a military family by any means. My father didn't, didn't serve. But my grandfather on my dad's side. He was a helicopter repairman with the Marines during World

War Two, and so he was stationed in the Pacific Theater. And so never again never really talked about it, but I knew he had some major issues coming from that he went, you know, he had some issues alcohol and my dad did give me his journal when he went through it. A, which is, you know, hard, hard to, hard to read through, and he clearly had a lot of trauma but has that sort of generation where you don't really talk about it and so never brought it up, never, you know, but had that very kind of stern Irish sweep under the rug sort of mentality. And then on my mother's side, my grandfather there, the my mother's side was very Dutch. So both my grandparents from that side were born in different countries, and my grandfather was part of the Dutch resistance, and so had some pretty near death experiences. Essentially, you know, fighting in that that sort of theater against Nazis and all that. And again, and again, didn't really get to know him he unfortunately passed away from cancer when I was three, saw some of his medals and all that kind of stuff. But you know, the obviously the there was a stuff there, but it growing up, the military was not in present in my life. And there's never really the expected thing for for myself.

J

James Geering 06:11

I'm sure it's something that's become apparent now because you've got such an incredible lens into the world of mental health. But one of the real aha moments for me was reverse engineering, not just one generation, but multiple, that multi generational trauma. With your grandfather being so closed down and clearly struggling, did you see any bleed into your father's upbringing?

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06:34

Yeah, probably on both side. Although, as with a lot of families, there's, there's a lot of trauma there. And, you know, our goals are to try to put a stop to it. So, you know, probably combination of the war, but then also the culture. Then, going to the grandparents on that side of the family, it was very, you know, when we're younger, we didn't really like going there, because it was very cold, you know, even when you got to hug it, it felt like a cold hug. Whereas my grandmother on my mom's side was much more warm and happy and all that kind of stuff. So go in there as this is very stern. And that's I think I might my my father grew up in, you know, he was, like us, it was an Irish family. So had four other siblings. And, you know, they were taken care of loved but it wasn't, I wouldn't say like the most the warmest or the most emotionally available upbringing. So I'd say a lot of my aunts and uncles on that side, have their own issues. My dad has progressed a lot. But even on that, that's, you can tell certain emotions are not the the comfortable landscape that he likes delving into. And then on my mom's side, there's just a lot of trauma. So my grandmother was born in Dutch Guiana in Suriname, in South America, and then my grandfather was mostly lived in the Dutch colony in Indonesia. And so they're sort of wandering European people. And so when they had kids, my mother and uncle, they, both the kids were in boarding schools in various parts of Europe. And so they kind of didn't get that warm embrace from their parents and just sort of the trauma of going to different schools, especially my mom went to Hainan, France, I was run by some very severe nuns. And so it's hard to say she'd never really mentioned the war specific trauma. But, you know, there were some stories, I'm sure that was always there. And who knows, of just being the sort of wayfaring stranger that he kind of was of go in different spots, possibly that

that had stuff to relate to it. So definitely on those sides of the residual trauma or PTSD that gets passed from generations, I think that's pretty apparent in, you know, family relatives, all that.

**J** James Geering 09:17

Yeah, I can actually relate. I love my grandparents, but there was an element of coldness on both sides. And both of my parents went to boarding schools as well. And when you think about that kind of rigid Victorian mentality, just before World War One and World War Two, that was a pretty fucked up time to be a child, you know, and I know that there was some pretty horrendous things that happened to them while they were there, too. So, you know, we forget now we've got I would argue, a pretty enjoyable high school and middle school and elementary school experience but some of these previous generations I mean, they they never saw their parents, you know, they were exposed to these people that may be kind or maybe cruel as hell and they had no defense against it whatsoever.

**i** 09:59

Yeah, I mean, especially for my mom. I mean, there's a lot of stories, you know, she was born left handed and in the the European culture back then that was born wrong. And so, you know, if you didn't use your right hand, you get beaten. And then because you go to like boarding schools in different countries, even to this day, she never found, like, the language that she felt most comfortable with, you know. And so, for her, she never taught us even she speaks Dutch and many other languages fluently. But she never taught my sister and I because for her, not speaking many languages, it was on the point of trauma, you know, just because it never, she never had a home in it. And so, that kind of stuff is definitely pretty interesting. So I agree with you. And that's why I kind of said of, like, never ideal to be a child of the divorce, but in this situation, where the alternative, you know, and you see this in previous generations, where you just stay together for the sake of not getting divorce, and then it causes more trauma or other issues. In this case, we had two parents that, you know, for sure loved us beyond any doubt. And it was much better for the situation, that they got separated, because it probably would have been a very hostile place to grow up. And on the benefits, you know, we got this pretty unique life. And then, now that we're older, different different spots that we can kind of go in and, you know, visit our parents being nice locations. So it's, it works out, but it is it is also to what you said, realizing the there is still is trauma and recognizing that but that were the fortunate you have in your life as well.

**J** James Geering 11:56

Absolutely, I can relate my my parents didn't divorce I was 18. So I was, you know, technically an adult, but it was a very toxic marriage. And they had five kids. And you know, our childhood was amazing, even though there was some times where it was very, very horrible because of the way they were to each other. But they ended up moving apart. And now we've got the same thing. My mom lives in Portugal, my dad used to live in France. So the visiting the parents thing is quite an international experience, which I enjoy. It's fun, and they don't they're much better off with their their partners now.



12:27

Yeah, absolutely. So I want



James Geering 12:29

to get into you know, that you kind of ramp up into the military. But before we do, again, with this lens, we talk great, great. We got excuse me, we talked grandparents and parents, when you look back now, you specifically, would there be elements of your childhood that you now would consider partly the trauma that you brought into the profession?



12:51

Yeah, and I think a lot stems to that. Divorce timeframe, as well as the residual trauma that we kind of brought in the, the equation. So, you know, the, the, by the time, you know, they're getting divorced, they're already pretty unhappy with each other. And they just kind of have the those opposite personalities that clash. And so even though I don't remember everything, I know, it was pretty kind of chaotic environment to be during that time. And so I think a lot of my trauma stems from that not having solid ground, right, where I was going back and forth between the parents and a lot of arguments and yelling, and just not really knowing what was going on, you know, being shuffled around, and all this kind of stuff. And, you know, it goes into better and worse situations through through that. And I think also at that time, my parents, stemming from their issues, we're trying to figure out how to be parents themselves, right? So they're trying to figure out like, what's going on with this and how to be a responsible adult. And so I think my sister and I matured pretty quickly from that. And I think from there, my family kind of had to all learn how to be adults in some way shape or form together. And then I think the other side of it, too, was from their own issues, especially with that emotional side. They after they, we never really saw them then that couple blueprint, right that that loving partner blueprint, especially at that early age, which is so important because that's when you learn the blueprints for the world of how you interact, how you interact with other people. And so, you know, they both dated afterwards, but they tend to keep it pretty hidden from us because I think they thought they're protecting it, but we never really saw like what healthy relationships look like, because neither remarried and they both had the their own personality things that kind of prevented them from longer term relationships. And so that's one of those things our relationship side, both my sister and I have struggled with, especially adolescence, just because we always just felt insecure or uncomfortable in that situation, because we didn't know what right looked like, or we didn't have that model. So I mean, that's one of those things, you know, intimacy is so important and finding a partner, making your mistakes or putting yourself out there being wanted by somebody else. If you don't have that, then that can just add to the issues you have. But then also, stemming from the the chaos, I had a lot of anxiety as a kid that manifested in a lot of different ways to where I think it's just me clinging on to constancy, consistency, where anything that was a change, or anything that would draw attention to myself, absolutely terrified me to the point of even, you know, there's this period when I was young of not wearing a striped shirt, anything else that had a different design and going to school and having somebody maybe notice that there was a different side was absolutely, like, terrifying to me. And that manifested in a few different ways, that severe anxiety and all that kind of stuff to the point where I had food poisoning once and you know, going from the airport, from my mother's, my father's, was always a emotional time, you know,

anxious feel time, emotionally charged time. And because they're also different styles of living. And so feeling sick on the way to the airport, and eventually vomiting, but then in my brain and anxious grabbing on, it got associated with that. And so anytime in the future of go to the airport, like that just grabbed on, and then I couldn't escape it. And then that would like manifest into other ways. So anytime, that is like a long trip that I've started feeling nauseous and anxious, and then the anxiousness got, like, associate with that. And then it manifested in insomnia. So like, all sorts of different things with that anxiety. And so, me as a kid, trying to figure out like, was my mind almost working against me in a lot of ways. And I mean, I think to the credit of that generation, I grew up but also, my mom, she was not into just going the pharmaceutical route, and very kind of more holistic healing, sometimes to not necessarily the best extreme, but oftentimes, but also not to the bad extreme you see in Western society, where everything was just, you know, medication, all that kind of stuff. So, you know, it could have easily been in a family where, you know, it's pretty severe issues, but had I gone on anti anxiety or other medications at that early age, you know, who knows what effect that could have had, you know, I wouldn't have had to come to terms with it, understand it. Those medications do alter brain chemistry, we really don't know, the long term effects of changing your kids chemistry with those pretty severe medications at that point. So I mean, it was definitely hard. But it definitely came to this point where I think I was actually in college or something, where I knew I have these issues, and I'm pretty good at like, compartmentalizing it, but I can't remember the situation. But I do remember there's a time when I finally realized that I had an anxiety field in college, and just having that name or understanding to it was actually a pretty big win, because then that gave me something tangible to identify and work for around or figure it out.

 James Geering 19:05

And what worked back then,

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um, depend on the thing, there's just different techniques. And you know, sometimes nothing worked. You know, with motion sickness is just kind of like focus or breathing or Verizon or what have you, or sometimes just puking and getting it over with, right? With other things is just whether I had the choice or not. I think my parents would just get frustrated with me because it manifested. That was picky too. So that did it. But it's pickiness exacerbated by anxiety of change. And so you know, them being parents and you get frustrated with your kid if everything's super picky. You know, they throw me in these situations and it'd be terrifying for me but you have to like, face that, like I remember the first time my classes broke and so My mom decided to give me contacts. And so it was like one of the scariest things of going into school again with that change and like, having people notice it, but I did it. And then that first day that second day wasn't as bad, you know, and then we're contacts from there. So I think just as life you just kind of have to face it and take your licks and and work with the tools you have. With with, with how you can have it. I think when I had like, really bad insomnia, I was just, you know, there's nothing I can do. So just move forward with this. It was really the the army, oddly enough that helped me overcome a lot of those issues.

 James Geering 20:47

was speaking of that, then so when you were in the school age, were you an athlete, we were sportsmen back then?

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No, I'd probably say the the opposite. I didn't play soccer or football and high school. But it was always JV team, I was the goalkeeper. You know, I was good in that. Fearlessly dive at people's feet, but I probably wasn't the most athletic. And did some like intramural sports, but I was anything but an athlete in in college. So yeah, I mean, just the when I was telling people just the prospect of wanting to go like special operations. I think a lot of people kind of looked at me said I'd have like, you have to be pretty, pretty fit and coordinated to do that. And I was like, alright, well, let's, let's see what I can do.

 James Geering 21:46

Well, I know that you didn't initially find yourself in the military. So what were you dreaming of becoming, and then walk me through that journey into the recruitment office.

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Um, a few different phases. I mean, my high school is pretty unique. We had a medical program within it. And so it actually shadowed the hospital and shadow surgeons. So at first I wanted to do that be like organ transplant surgeon or whatever the top level surgeon I can be. But then as I kind of more realize it, like the idea that I have to do four years undergrad, four years medical school, eight years residency, and then what if I change my mind, I'm kind of stuck in this sort of thing that everybody was telling me, I wouldn't be able to have a family after that, or life. So then, you know, though, I invested, I started investing in stocks deliver early age. And so I was also interested in finance and business, that kind of became the trajectory. You know, I liked how money worked in my parents always raised me to be financially responsible. So that's, you know, when I applied to schools, I was either applying for business finance, or what I ended up doing economics. And so then that trajectory is kind of the height of finance, Wall Street, all that kind of stuff. So when I was going through grad school, this was oh, five. It was the heyday, you know, people were going into Wall Street to Goldman, even you know, Junior analysts were walking away with six figure bonuses at the end of the year. And it became the sort of thing as I was going through it, every major that had some sort of relation to finance was vying for those jobs. So all the engineers and mathematicians, the even people who are in other things were going for, like the HR at Goldman Sachs, who knows, like everybody. And so I was doing like internships and all that kind of stuff. It is super competitive, even though it's going through a good school. There's a lot of other people not that same sore spot. But I remember doing like interviews for Morgan Stanley, and it'd be this giant conference room filled with people nervous in their best suits, and everybody had 15 Well, this was the next level. So this is after they took your application. And you got that first interview. And everybody had a 15 minute interview to prove their stuff to like wearied interview Earth. And so there's just like a mass and you'd have these meet ups where there's like order herbs and Deutsche Bank would present itself and then everybody be huddled around that and be like, Oh, I did this. I did this. It was it was pretty chaotic, and super competitive. And so I had to like struggle tooth and nail to even find like any sort of internship, but I found some small boutique investment bank in New York ended up

doing that really liked it. And because it was a smaller company, I got the opportunity to be in situations that I would normally not be if you know analyst from Goldman Sachs, you kind of have to prove your worth being at the small company that was in meetings, taking notes at billion dollar private equity funds and actually having a little bit of a voice and talking to high net worth, investors and stuff. So it's pretty interesting and certainly about that. But then my graduating year, oh nine, for people who are not familiar, oh 2009 was one of the largest financial collapses of recent memory. And so it was just a bloodbath on Wall Street. So people I knew friends I knew that had internships at Bear Stearns at Lehman had family members, they're all sudden, everybody was out of a job and nobody knew what was going on. And it was like dominoes, too. And so all sudden, there's this flood of applicants on the market was still able to continue my job. After I graduated, that same investment bank, by that time either already decided to join the military, but I wanted to at least get some real world experience beyond the the internships. So I worked there for about a year, it was super interesting, just because being in that same situation with same people seeing the fear in their eyes, and I still liked it, but it was also the it was the good and bad sides of New Yorker finance, where you have all these people that are super competitive, and some of the best and brightest and you know, they're all challenging you to be the best that you can be on the other side, just a lot of self interest and a lot of self serving. And that's what caused the implosion of greed and self interest. Not really caring about the the repercussions of, of all these actions, and it blew up in everybody's face. And so seeing that sort of difference in the world, and, you know, money just not moving. And it was it was pretty interesting time to be literally on Wall Street. During that. And it also sort of cemented in. Around that time. I was already kind of interested in joining the military. But for me, growing up, what was always intriguing, interesting to me was people who didn't have to go into the military deciding to do it. So I always, like the old school like actors that joined during World War Two that left their careers or you always had those stories. And for some reason, that always appealed to me, I always respected that of service to something bigger than themselves. And so you know, the naive, so very much patriotic side of me, also just kind of looking for a challenge. Had that notion. And so then when this implosion happened in Wall Street, it just kind of cemented that in of like, one, this place is not going anywhere, I got some time, but to you know, I want to get back to something bigger, I don't want to just feed into my own look how great I am from this great college. And, you know, realize that a lot of time and there's a different trajectory. I think also on a small scale, I expected much more coming to this like great Ivy League college thing, I thought I was going to graduate and be, you know, this philosopher that had a good perspective on the world and was an adult. But then, when I was graduating and like looked around, I was like, we're awful, dopey kids, and we haven't done anything, you know, I just felt like I lacked that. This is all so this is all pass reflection. But what I realized is that I just didn't have that coming of age or becoming a man ritual or experience or anything. And for whatever reason, fortunately, I had the intuition that that's what I needed. That's what I was searching to test myself and to put myself out there.

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James Geering 28:54

I found myself in the performance world as a stuntman. And when I transitioned in the fire service, it was the same thing. It was the first time like I really felt like I had purpose. And I wanted to be a firefighter when I was young. But I was told through a medical that my eyes were the color vision wasn't right. And I couldn't be a firefighter in the UK. So fast forward, you know, 10 plus years later, I get the opportunity again, and then a few years later fatherhood. And it is incredible, because you contrast the two and I'm sure it was the same as the world of finance, even though there's some incredible humans in the performance world in the finance world. Really, the focus is me first, you know, whether it's in the limelight, whether it's



financially, and then you've had the complete polar opposite with the good men and women in the first responder professions in the military, is I will put other people before me. And it's a it's a very polarizing concept for a lot of people. But when you've had a foot on either side, it really gives you that perspective of, you know, what truly nurtures the soul.

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Yeah, absolutely. And just having that sense of that there is something beyond you that something bigger Than you.

 James Geering 30:01

Absolutely. So you didn't just try and find like a, you know, desk job in the Air Force, you chose a range of contracts. So walk me through what made you try and put yourself on the front lines.

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And I feel like if you're gonna do anything, you might as well commit full on, right? Like, it's, it wasn't there for just like had people thanked me for my service and say I joined the military, it's like, if I'm gonna make this big decision, I'm gonna go all in it. Otherwise, it's a waste of my time and everybody's time. And so I knew I was gonna do infantry. And I wanted to enlist, and for people are not familiar, generally speaking, if you have a college degree, you go, there's two main paths of going into military officer, which is called commissioned or enlisted, which is sort of the grunts like the the frontline people. And so the Commission, the officers was sort of a program to encourage people who have college degrees to get in, they're generally higher ranking, higher paid, they do more of the planning, logistics, whereas the enlisted do, you know, the heavy lifting, and, you know, the work in the mud and Frontline kind of stuff, I mean, officers will be on the front lines, but generally different capacity. So I wanted to do that. Because one, you know, I wanted to really, like I said, go in all the way. And I felt like having an economics degree didn't qualify me as a leader of armed forces. And so I wanted to learn leadership, the only way I thought you could have, you know, of course, being the lowest level and building it up and learning it along the way. And then also, I knew, not really coming from military family in terms of my parents, and this being a complete left turn, because they weren't really, there'll be a tracking, I wanted to do this. So that became sort of a huge unwelcome New Year's surprise for many. But if I was gonna go in, I want to be the best treatment possible, and also surrounded by the best trade. You know, I mean, there's something intriguing about going through one of the toughest programs, but it was also just the sheer, like, I'm doing something stupid, I'm going to at least be prepared and stupid when doing it. And so it was kind of between a toss up of the different special operations. And I attended to settle on either Greenbrae or Ranger. And then, you know, didn't really know that much about it. Either one, as much as I could, I did due diligence. But there wasn't that much information about it, there's much more now with all the TV shows and books. So I just kind of did my best guess, of what was the best sort of trajectory. And it seemed Ranger fit kind of more into that like, super hard to get in, you're going in, it's kind of the the quickest way you're going to get there and actually, you know, get to the frontlines and do stuff, as opposed to sitting around. And, you know, even if there's certain spots where if you have all this training, not necessarily utilizing it, and so the full package and, you know, at that time I wasn't going to

enlist for was the contracts tend to be four to six years. And or you can do more. And so the Ranger just offered sort of the first, the best option of what I sort of saw in terms of preparing myself being surrounded by pretty impressive people. And getting me to figure out what this this next chapter this next world would be,

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James Geering 33:37


when you talk touched on before about how the army really helps with the sleep, the anxiety. So now you've got tribe, you've got purpose, you've got physical, you know, requirements, you've got mental requirements, you've got people relying on you, what were the elements, as you look back now, that started positively affecting some of the mental health stuff that you'd been dealing with as a younger man.

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33:58

I mean, first and foremost. One, like I said, it was wouldn't be considered by anybody around me as an athlete. So just getting to that spot. You know, I started training, I started running, started doing push ups, I knew I'd have to be able to do at least you know, 100 pushups, just to get able to knock on the door. And so I really just started training and getting that physical shape and that mental shape of having that discipline. And so just that brings confidence, right of like, switching from a doe academic to somebody that can, you know, keep up and do well on physical fitness tests, just gives you that walking around competence. And then also just getting through Ranger selection, which is the first phase of it, which was super difficult. And I think the first like, major challenge of that of yeah, just just overcoming something that's so difficult and so hard to prepare for beyond the physical was a huge confidence boost and sense of self and just understanding, you know, who I am, where I stand and what I'm capable of. And, you know, just throughout in the training ranger school later, which is a longer sort of engagement, all these things are geared to test your limits test, your mental fortitude test, how you react under these extreme situations. So it's really pushing you to these edges, and seeing what's left, right. And for instance, asleep, that's, that's kind of an easy one to understand where, like I said, we're in college, the anxiety with like a test coming up, I wouldn't sleep one night, and then I'd get so worried about the future test of not sleeping, because then it would affect my performance. And that anxiety would then prevent me from not sleeping. And then the anxiety of never sleeping again, would prevent me from not sleeping. And so then it just dragged out, we're in either one of these training the Ranger School Ranger selection, you'd wake up be absolutely exhausted body completely taxed, probably gotten, you know, if you're lucky in our sleep. And then you'd have to do a 12 mile ruck march with 45 pounds plus on your back, and you'd wake up and be like, there's no way this is possible. I'm just exhausted, like, I haven't slept, I haven't done all this kind of stuff, you know, where the passion is, like, oh, I only got two hours of sleep, I couldn't, I can't do anything. This you actually had to do something. And you do it, you get up, you get dressed, you get to the start line, and you go, and you give it your all while you're there. And it just really helps you understand of how much more you're capable of than the limitations your brain puts on, you know how most we're using, you know, 70% of our capacity. And that's probably not for the most case. And so really just put a lot of that kind of stuff. Like by putting it to the extreme. I never had that spot again, where I was worried about sleep, it just it took the power from that anxiety, where in the future, if I put in sleep, it was like, alright, well, I'll just be a little bit more tired. But I'm still going to be perfectly capable tomorrow. Right? So it's almost changing the window of what's what I'm capable of. I

think there's really that combination of just understanding for the extremes of what's possible, what's capable. And then also that self confidence of okay, no matter what I can overcome this, or I can do that. And so I think it was that combination of that toughening up and mental fortitude. Sense of Self. So even to this day, if I'm feeling nauseous, or I'm getting carsick, then I'd rather just like, alright, well, let me just keep to get out of the way. So I'm not, you know, dragging up because I'm not embarrassed, like, it's fine. If I had that sort of case. Whereas other be dragging it on and then be at the least opportune moment, something along those lines, you know, of what what makes you fear a fearful and then actually confronting it takes the power away from the anxiety. So things like that just really gave me a sense of self and what I'm actually capable of.

 James Geering 38:28

So when I asked you a question that I asked anyone who was deployed within a war zone, and the reason I asked this is, the rest of us, the civilians of the world get a very polarized view of war through mainstream media, either the one side, kill them, or let God sort them out. Or the other side, they're all baby killers. And in the middle are the men and women or I say often children that we send to war with our country's flag on the shoulder. And it's important that we hear their voices. So regardless of the politics that sent you to either your first deployment or wherever it was, Were there moments where you realize that there were atrocities being committed that there were some horrendous people that you needed to take care of?

 39:10

Um, yeah, I mean, when you're there, it's such a different environment and mentality and, and all that kind of stuff. So I mean, it's complicated. And so unfortunately, I kind of came in knowing this and has a little bit more, I think, nuanced or philosophical approach to it, where I mean, pretty early on when I was deployed to I did three deployments to Afghanistan, and each one was unique in its own way, different views of the war and the engagement. I was fortunate enough to where I was never in you know, it wasn't guarding like prisons or I was never in like, a situation where we're there's atrocities done by our side or anything like that. I was fortunate that Most, the time was pretty black and white. But being over there, it was pretty apparent of it was a question well, why we're still in Afghanistan. I mean, you can argue your original reasons for going in Afghanistan, particularly, but then when it started extending, and by the time I was over, there was 2010 1112. That by time weird already been there for 10 plus years and no clear and, and plan in sight and various degrees of attention from the international community where sometimes we forget about it. Other times, there'll be resurgent. And so from a geopolitical standpoint, and just from a country standpoint, it's like, this is kind of silly that we're still here. And it's kind of ridiculous and frustrating that we're not either getting the support or anything else to it. But when you're there, I mean, it's pretty clear one, you know, you hear this a lot of, you're doing the best you can because it's you're working as a unit, and if one part of it collapses, it affects everybody else. Right. So protecting your brothers you're serving with. On the other side, too, you know, especially as a ranger, we had very specific high level missions. And so the people who were addressing or engaging, generally speaking, had done some pretty bad stuff, you know, generally speaking, we're not. And again, you can argue of like, well, what they'd be doing that if we weren't there, but we'll walk for these people, I'd say more often than not, yeah, there they were, there weren't on the happy go lucky pathway, which is a very complex geopolitical sort of thing. But we were arresting people that were

putting bombs in the street that maybe we were targeting us, but would kill civilians too, or high level, terrorist network generals that had done their own atrocities and all this other kind of stuff, it gets very complicated there. But from that side, like when you're on mission, those things were a little bit kind of easier. So I never had, that it was just sort of the the broader perspective of the engagement. And so that's what I try to tell people now, too, is, you know, when you have these sort of, like, You're horrible people, America sucks, and baby killers and all that kind of stuff. I mean, one, that's once you get to that level, then it's hard to argue with that kind of person, because that's kind of closing the doors to a rational conversation anyway. But for people who are willing to listen and just don't understand, you have to separate the soldier and the reasons people are going in versus how military and these people are being used, right. I mean, at the end of the day, in my mind, there's not been a period in history where there hasn't been violent for war, the vast majority of cultures and tribes and communities have needed people to become people of service to protect them. Oftentimes using violence, that's been a pretty consistent theme throughout humanity, we haven't figured out a way otherwise. So you're always going to need this type of person, this archetype to be the protectors in some way, shape, or form the same way you need the archetypes of healers, and teachers, those are very consistent things for a reason. And so you are asking these people to sacrifice and I do think there are people that are built to do that. The idea and the whole point of society is that you want the society and the politicians and the public figures to utilize that in just ways and just as a hard term, but we can all agree on certain parameters within just and we have certain wars that we believe are more just than others. And so, you know, gets flexible, but to blame the soldier for being put into engagements that are dubious because of other interests. That's where it gets tricky, right? And that's you're putting them in a situation or you're not giving them the proper mental health or the support, then you're pushing them to these extreme situations where sometimes bad stuff happens. And that does not, you know, there might be bad people. There's definitely bad apples in there. But there's so many people that are there for good for service or for what they think that they're protecting this broader perspective. Right. I do think a lot of them have been mis served. And I do think that causes cultural scars that we that are hard to see. They're not as palpable, but they do have impacts. For instance, you're talking about generational trauma, like I think the Vietnam engagement did severe damage to the US culturally, in terms of trust, I think these 20 years of war also, to a different degree doing damage, because we're not addressing a lot of the major issues and concerns. And so I think those have generational issues. I think they have trust issues. I think they have to issues with how the military is being engaged in the US. We're also seeing record low numbers of people signing up. I mean, people are pointing different reasons. But I do think that that trust is one of the things that that's caused by that.

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James Geering 45:15

Well, I mean, I've seen this over and over again. And Sebastian Junger, who wrote *Tribe*, I was lucky enough to talk to him again, today, we're going to do another another episode. But just, you know, hashing these ideas off him. We're talking about this multi generational trauma and homecoming and ceremonies and all these things that we'll get into in a bit. But that's what we forget, there was a cost for World War Two. And I would argue that World War Two was one of those that we needed to take up arms, you know, and I would have signed up myself, you know, absolutely. But when I was a young man, we had the Falklands conflict. I don't think that one was worth dying for a little rock on the ocean that I think we could have probably used diplomacy, and maybe I'm completely ignorant. But I don't think it needed the bloodshed that we had. And that's what I grew up in as a young boy, that pushed me away from the military, even then, I'm just like, it didn't compute to me that a politician who wasn't gonna go to war,

could send a bunch of high school kids off to go kill other high school kids. Right, you mentioned about the withdrawal, something that I seem to be a consistent message, especially from SF for some reason, I think it's because of the force multiplier element, maybe. I keep hearing that with the Afghanistan conflict, if they could, you know, be king for a day, totally different operators, all the same community would have gone in, it would have lasted about year and a half, two years, they would have shut down all the training camps, taken out the main targets and then got out again, now you have this, this conversation, and I'm a complete, you know, just a civilian on the outside looking in from another country. But what scares me the same way as if you there's profit in pharmaceuticals for high blood pressure, and cholesterol and diabetes, there's no checks and balances, to make sure that we have the healthiest population, and we have 70% people that are obese or overweight. Now, I see the same with war. It's a very worrying element that there are people that make billions, if not trillions of dollars, when our young men and women are overseas. So what is your perspective coming from a finance and economics background? On the kind of military industrial complex element? And how do we kind of pull on the reins of that? So that as you said, we go to war when we absolutely have no choice?



47:24

Yeah, I mean, I think it's hard unless you're the most staunch patriot, I think it's hard to deny that that is a factor. And that has been a factor in these engagements, and it's hard to deny that that's had a voice. And what we've been doing in there, as with everything is complex, I think, you know, sometimes some of the leading generals might just be so disengaged, or we're always fighting the war from the past. And so we haven't really developed this sort of town counterinsurgency mentality or lead Acton, which is, you know, what, what was suggested by the special operations that you've, you've talked with more behind the scenes action on the standing core. So there is that transitional aspects. But also, I mean, you know, relates to my current role of job is the, like you said, departments, articles, like, it's, there's absolutely lobbying efforts, and there's absolutely a reason why they're making the most money and having, oftentimes the least effect. And people are, will consider a farmer pharmaceutical that has this whole list of bad interactions or negative repercussions, including suicide that are meant for suicide, and nobody bats an eye, but you talk to them about a mushroom that is relatively safe from a health perspective. And people freak out that that's the most dangerous thing in the world. So I mean, that's how we've been gearing ourselves and training ourselves. And it's definitely the same in the military side, the military industrial complex. I mean, it's it's the lobbying it's the money has voice, money has power, you know, there is going to be this sort of thing of like, and you see it play out in politics. If you create these parameters where, just right where you put two sides against each other, you don't even have to put the pressure because the pressure is already there from this competition. And so you see that the two party system in the US where if one side reduces the military budget, or does it engage in the right way than the other side's gonna, you know, go against them in the media saying they're weak, they're soft, they cause these terrorist attacks, they cause all this kind of stuff. And it just it's this machine that if you just put the right pressure spots, it just keeps hurting itself out. And then all these people on the side are absolutely making money. Um, so I mean, you have to, I mean, I think one of the things is, from that, you have to look at the system itself, you know, I think, oftentimes we look too much at the, just the kind of more simplified versions of like, hey, if we just take this out, then everything's gonna be great. But oftentimes, these systems are built to encourage that, and so they just kind of almost never will be happen, you just need a few bad players to take advantage of it, which will always find so I think, you know, to start addressing it and start talking about it and getting it out there. I mean, the lobbying side is

definitely one big factor. But lobbying in itself is complex. And, you know, I don't I don't have a good, you know, I have like the talking points that everybody else can say that it's just like, if you just do this, and everything's gonna be great. But I also know, it's far more complex. And it's even if you had the perfect plan of getting that enacted, is just so tricky. And so that's, I just, I just don't know how you get past that. For instance, one of the examples I remember, again, kind of on the drug war of the US, there are certain people that have been sent to prison like 70 year terms for having cannabis in certain cases, right of having this and they've had the oftentimes race motivated, but you know, versus you know, rapist that will get out after like, 10 years or something, you know, just these from from cannabis, there might be other stuff there. But the final drugs, cannabis, and so then there's been certain politicians that will like, Okay, well, reasonably, we've moved on from that, let's release them, let's let them back into society after they've been in prison for so long. And so you do that, and then even from that, but then, generally speaking, there's always one bad person that they got worse in prison. And so then they do something even worse on the outside, and then all sudden, this person that lead that, you know, is releasing criminals is endangering your children, even though most of us in a rational spot could agree like, hey, that's probably a reasonable policy, that person shouldn't be in there. But that person then goes and rob the store, then it just blows up. So I don't know how to get past that, like that cycle. I think it's, it's so intertwined with the news media so intertwined with our bill or lack of, we don't train rational thinking, it doesn't pay back to have rational thinking, I think that military industrial complex is so stuck in that sort of system or using that system to its advantage. I mean, when I mentioned the banking thing, we're going through the same banking cycles to like we just keep getting caught in these loops. Because it's, I don't know how to get out of it. So sorry, to keep the damper on that. But I do think we need to identify not only the issue, like the military industrial complex, but the systems, the things that are encouraging it, the reasons why we keep falling into the same loops, and it keeps getting worse and progressing. And trying to figure out, how do we at least stop that or take a step outside of

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James Geering 53:17

it? Well, I think it's important to have conversations like this, because like you said, I think at its foundation is not complicated. But the less we're aware of it, and the less we unify, the more complicated it becomes if we as a country demand that lobbying is removed from politics. You know, ultimately, we could force that. But as long as we're divided, like you said, Someone recently I forget who it was, I wish I credit them, but they talked about the division. They're like, take medieval England, if you've got the villagers fighting amongst themselves, what are they not doing? They're not looking at the castle and wondering why they've got all the money. You know what I mean? I was like, that's such a perfect analogy. As long as we're divided and set against each other, whether it's race or woke ism, or, you know, whatever the hell subject wants to be transgender athletes, because that's, you know, that takes up the majority of the population, you know, then, you know, they can get away whatever. And the perfect example is we're having all these shootings at the moment, regardless of stance on guns, we are having Americans murdered, and yet half the population is arguing about who's on the Bud Light can. I mean, that's how fucking distracted we are. And you should be ashamed of yourselves if that's been taken your attention. But as long as that keeps happening, we're not going to address the physical health crisis. We have the mental health crisis and the violence epidemic that we have.

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 54:39

But it's I mean, it's just so easy to distract people. I mean, I've had this thought before with the mental health side and, you know, veterans have been disturbed by mental and health issues for decades. It's always taken generations of veterans to suffer and die before anything good It's done. And then when it's done, it's the least effective means possible. And if veterans got together and just made, it was like a one issue voting bloc, right? Like, hey, fix this, or we're not voting for you, it would get change pretty quickly. But within that group, it is a diverse group. And so then the moment you can say, like, oh, well, if you do that, then these people are going to take the guns away, then all sudden, you just blow that apart. And then you know, we don't get health care even. And all the divisions are always exaggerated in a realistic setting. But it's just an I think it's, I think that the other side of it, we're just in this new generation of stimulation, social media. And we just, you know, I don't know if our brains are fully equipped for it, we're just so easily distracted. And like, you know, look at the shiny object. And they're all geared. You know, it's the technology that's geared to aggravate us into filamentous. I've been caught up into it to where you just go too long on the news media, and you feel like the world's gonna end tomorrow.

 James Geering 56:13

Absolutely. Well, I want to get to your transition now. But before we do the other side of that question that I asked, when you found yourself deployed in again, you are in a combat zone. I think one of the most nauseating things that I see mainstream media do is they paint an entire country as the enemy. So right now Russia is the enemy. And I've say this a lot. I doubt that a Russian farmer, somewhere in the middle of you know, Russian countryside, is really thinking about invading the Ukraine. Is it happening? Yes. So their atrocities? Yes. Is it wrong? Also? Yes. But are all Russians evil? No, are all Iraqis or Afghani is evil? Absolutely. Not. So many were our allies, and so many were oppressed. So when you found yourself amidst one of these countries, were there any stories of kindness and compassion amidst these, these combat zones? That really resonated with you?

 57:02

Yeah, absolutely. I mean, unfortunately, we were not as directly, there was one training spot where we're training some of the local commandos and stuff. But beyond like interpreter's, there weren't too we didn't have too much interaction with the population, because it was kind of more quick action kind of things and trying to find a guy. But I mean, like, even to this day, I'd say like the stories of the people that put themselves out there, even when things were falling apart in Afghanistan, like the interpreters and all these other people that were just sincerely helping, because they just want to, you know, help their their families or their plan, or in some cases of the country, you know, I didn't necessarily get too much sense of an Afghani country beyond like the cities and stuff. But there are people who sincerely wanted to change from what the the alternative ulterior was, from what the other side that they saw. And, you know, there's been great organizations that have been trying to get those people home, because a lot of them were sort of left over there, with the sort of catastrophic fall of Afghanistan. And so I mean, there definitely are, there's some, there's some amazing people and like you said, the vast majority were just kind of going on their their life. It's same as

anywhere, and people just want to do their life don't want to get messed with they want to be have their house invaded by either locals or foreigners or anything like that. But that just seems to be a harder equation for, for anybody to master.

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James Geering 58:37

Absolutely, I appreciate your perspective. All right. So I want to get to your transition. One of the things that I see as a common denominator is people, more often than not will struggle from the transition from uniform back to civilian life. And you know, you when you're in uniform, you have a sense of purpose, you know, you're serving your community or country, you've got a tribe, you got a community, and then more often than not as jarring finality of what you used to do. And then you find yourself in the civilian world. What made you decide to transition out? And then what was your transition experience? Like initially?

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59:12

Yeah, so I decided it was almost similar of going in and I was just the stars aligned. I've been fortunate that sometimes the message is rather clear. And then everything in your life just sort of reinforces that I got to the spot where my contract was, was up. So it was in for about four and a half years. Already had done a few deployments. Like I said, at that time, it was the initial withdrawal from Afghanistan, and that looked like we were kind of going into like this peacetime dynamic right. And so it didn't look like there's anything in the future. And in the military, that starts switching the budget, and then also things start getting really stupid. People like have all this energy, but nothing to do you know, and so they're just like Talking about increasing the training cycle, which is already stressful, and it was just starting to get stupid is probably the best word. So that was sort of the prospect I, I ranked up rather quickly in during those years. So in terms of my duty position in terms of what I was in charge of the by that time I was an E five, so a sergeant in the East seventh position. So normally, it would take me about another 10 to 12 years to get to that that spot. So I was in charge of 30 plus individuals, sometimes more. And so then again, I was at that spot, kind of figured out how the game worked, you know, great people, but there's also some bad politics and can be very Doggy Dog and Ranger Regiment. And so I got to the spot where it would take me another, at least seven to 10 years to get to another duty position. And then we're going into this peace time. And then all this other kind of stuff that just kind of made me a little bit more disillusioned with people actually having your back happened during that time. And so it was like, alright, we'll, and also had some wear and tear on my body, you know, some injuries and all that kind of stuff. And I could have either, you know, gone to the next level, either like special forces or tried to go either to the next year or change chapters. And so it just seemed like the time to came chapters are already gone and a little bit older than other people. I didn't want to lose, you know, what semblance I had of my economic degree. And so just again, it seemed like the right time, so decided to get out. And I thought, you know, I was gonna hit the ground running, and the stranger background had this economic background was still pretty young. And so yeah, just decided to do that. I took some freedom. After that, in terms of the savings, I had some free time and traveled around the world, lived in a few different countries, which is great and just kind of decompressing, unwinding, figure out what the next step was, and then ended in Tampa, Florida, back and finance.



 James Geering 1:02:20

Now, it seems to be a reoccurring theme that if people basically find that another way of serving, that seems to be the least flow or the most flawless transition. So what I've seen from a lot of people that really found it jarring as they went into selling homes, or finance or some of these, because, again, like you talked about the beginning, before you went in, there's a little bit of that self serving money making element and not so much of the service to the community and others, did you find yourself kind of regressing a little bit once you're in that profession?

 1:02:58

Yeah, I think for a few different reasons. But I mean, I've also had been in that before, or some form of it. And so, and there's parts of it, I think I needed some sort of intrigue, like some sort of Challenger, like I just got, from this big challenge. I think my cup was pretty full from the service side of it, at least for that time. So I had this, at least a little bit of liberty to find the next thing that was challenging or, and hopefully make money, you know, that that would have been nice. I didn't know what shape or form that would come into. And I, you know, I didn't really know about the services, I didn't use the services, and I still kind of found it hard to find a job just throwing my my application out there, I thought was going to be much easier. But I was also Yeah, just looking for that challenge. And it would have been nice to get paid more and that. And so when I first when I found the job, I was in this big international company in Tampa, and it was a corporate job. But I was in this sort of new department because the company had been doing well and had like, joined the acquired different companies but didn't do it efficiently. When the economy turned, it was losing a lot of money if they formed this division that was essentially the budgeting and financial analysis of all 60 Country departments. So in that, in that side, it was pretty interesting and got back into figuring out Excel modeling and finance and getting my brain back into that sort of mode. And as again, the challenge was like figuring out what I can do and talking to these execs in different countries and I was you know, talking to the CFO every day and doing well getting promotions and so at first was good like okay, this is exactly the good step up. But then, and on the other side is like I was trying to build a community so build some friend networks, going to social engage mints, I was volunteering for what they call Make a wish. So I was on like a youth council on that have just kind of be involved with that. And so like, on the outside, I was, you know, hitting all the check marks of what Jesse the mature responsible person shouldn't be doing. But it was also some of the issues that formed just from being in that high charged Ranger environment for so long. And the, all the other issues that come from that, including physical issues from, you know, as I was a mortarman, within Ranger, so had a lot of Concussive Blast my head and injuries and the hard charge and the combat and all that kind of stuff, which you know, was never really dealt with her dress, and I kind of came out with ego, like, Oh, I'm good, you know, came in more mature, understand this, conceptually understand what this is about. Also having overcome other issues, I thought it was progressing and not gonna regress. And so I think being in that corporate environment, there's a few things that started to happen as one more travel, I could kind of ignore it. And life's always a party when you're traveling. And so you know, some of the bad behavior of, you know, excessive alcohol use or whatever, was starting to seep into that nine to five job. And then also, just the whole point of corporations, your job is to sort of limit the amount of creativity on a day to day basis, right. So you're trying to automate your own job. And that's what makes you a more efficient worker, you're trying to make the model that makes you have to think about it less than just you putting the numbers in pops out what you need. And so more and more, as I kind of learned and gotten the flow, that I think I was losing

that stimulation, I was losing that challenge aspect. And then it'd be these long weeks of doing the budget, and stress and getting no sleep. And then without the kind of reward that you might have got in the military of like, doing something a purpose, it was just kind of that like, Hey, good job, we did this and the company save some money, you know, and so it was changing that formula of gratification and what you put into the system, what you're getting out, in addition to these mental health challenges that I wasn't quite ready to acknowledge that I had, until, you know, they started filling their their face, and some very apparent ways.

 James Geering 1:07:44

Well, it's interesting is that parallels, some of my friends have had on a one particular chat, he's a firefighter, he was actually green, we got Greenbrae qualified, he never actually deploy because his at the time alcoholism ended up spiraling down. So we have this kind of high up tempo training Captain super engaged. And then he had this tumble down again, then he found the fire service stayed super engaged and hit about the 10 year mark, which I would argue is when things really start getting a little less exciting. I mean, you can be in the busiest, you know, high up tempo station, which I did for a lot of my career. But eventually, what would be an absolute ask kick in fire, when you've been on two years, is now barely gets your heart rate up when you've been on 10 years. So again, that excitement that reward, even that physicality, you become more efficient, you know, you're not running around anymore. You're the guy that can do the elbow now. So that's interesting how that parallels your journey, even in finance.

 1:08:42

Yeah, yeah. And, you know, one of those things that became clear, I mean, this is post recollection of that time is just understanding. Yeah, I mean, there's a sense of service too. But I think, for me, it's being engaged, positively, you know, not just going for those adrenaline spikes, but having something that's challenging me, mentally, but also, it can be different thing. So like staying physically engaged, and then also some sort of challenge to creativity mentality. And then, you know, hopefully not doing something bad, hopefully doing something that helps other people or that adds to the cultural, you know, giving something along those lines, like something that is of significance. And I think that it's also, I think there's a personality difference. I think there are some people that they live for the weekends in their free time and their hobbies, right? So they can go to the nine to five, they can grind it out, they get their paycheck, and then they can do whatever they want on their free time on their PTO. I think there's others that need more. If they're spending time investing their time they need that feedback while they're doing it and I fall in that latter category. I believe that

 James Geering 1:10:00

So where was the darkest place you found yourself.

 1:10:05

Um, it was just during those times of trying to figure it out. And again, still struggling with like the relationship sort of thing, doing well, and the job was starting to not be stimulating, didn't really, you know, I was doing the whole dating apps kind of stuff, and you get what you pay for

really, you know, I was doing the whole dating apps kind of stuff, and you get what you pay for with that. And so just not having any, any good relationships just sort of a superficial kind of thing. And so then I was just trying to figure it out. I was like, Okay, where do I be social and go to my local pub, and then you're gonna meet people that are also always go into local pubs, I met some good friends there. But then it's, it's all this drinking culture. And then that just exacerbates with the stuff I was already struggling with. And then just, you know, starting to feel some of my injuries more in different ways. And being young and just not really knowing what the next direction was not having a good relationship. And then the anxiety and depression starting to creep in a lot more, where, say, the darkest times would just be those weeks where I would just get to the end of it. And what I describe, you know, depression can manifest in different ways. But for me, it just be like a Friday night, I didn't really want to, like go out to drink just because I didn't want to like be stumbling home, but then just be at home and couldn't even watch Netflix, just because there was nothing that was just so gray. And there's nothing that could stimulate me just be staring at the ceiling, and couldn't listen to me. Like it's hard to explain, but nothing can draw your attention and almost like things are so annoying in what they can't draw your attention. And so then the solution is either I can just stay up all night and just be in this grayness or drink, and then eventually sort of pass out, you know, like that, sort of ease that and then at least you get some sort of sleep. And then during times, I'm just like, be lonely and go to the bar, just be in a social situation or think. And then you know, one thing will lead to another and somebody, you get into this conversation and drink too much, or somebody's off your shots, and then just come home and like, Be home like completely drunken, like a member, I came home once and stumbled on the asphalt walking home and just busted up my whole hand, you know, and waking up the next day, like with blood on the sheets, and like what the hell are you doing, especially coming from that like, optimal range or life of where you view yourself as you know, this this peak physical and mental sort of capacity. And there you work hard, play hard as well, but you're younger. And you're also forced to like keep in certain parameters. And so it's just those sort of weeks where she's like, why did you go out? And why did you take that next break? And why? What's going on? Like, what, what is this accomplishing, and it's just started freaking me out just because there's like, this pathway is going to lead to some bad situation like, you're going to do something that you can't take back. Like, I feel like I had rolled the dice enough, gotten lucky that it wasn't anything like too detrimental or them putting myself in some bad situation. But it's seemed like only a matter of time. And so I was just in that spot of just like, fortunately, I saw the red flags, and I saw that there was stuff going on, but I also didn't know what to do. So it was around that time I went to the VA and actually talk to them. And I'm sure you hear these kind of stories too. I already had some bad relationships with the VA where I applied for some disability for like my back and knees and all this kind of stuff. Just even get it on the radar. So they got worse. And it took them two years even to get back to me to get a phone call. And then it was kind of a bullshit assessment that took all of 45 minutes for full body and mental evaluation. But anyway, so then I went you know, when I got that and I went to go see if I wanted to just talk to a therapist, like 14 I was like, alright, well, I'm not handling this well, like I tried to make the changes, I was bringing in good practices in my life. I was starting to learn how to cook on my own. I was trying to find social situations that weren't just pub based. I was trying to you know, engage in other kinds of stuff like meditation and you know, decide to see a therapist and then they essentially said You know, I told him I wasn't ready to go on medication medication seemed like the next step right like it seemed it seemed good sides of it seemed bad sides of it just didn't seem like the first go to to like talking to somebody was the first go to but they made it pretty apparent that unless I agreed to the full like protocol. I can go to a few therapy sessions, but that's about it. And so kind of walked away from there and it all just even the PTSD side of things seem like a rubber stamp. like not really answering baseline questions, but not really trying to understand what was causing it, what was reactive, and it was just one

of those situations where just found myself on the spot was like, Alright, I'm on my own, I gotta figure this out or not. And so it was just kind of the accumulation of that of like, I don't know what to do, right. And things are going down seems like my body's going down. And at the same time, like I knew my parents were worried about like the alcohol use. And I didn't know what to tell them. Because my, in my mind at that thought, and I actually kind of stand by that to this day, I had two choices, I could either go on the prescribed medication route, where again, I've seen a lot of cases where it just zaps who the person is, or can lead to more severe conditions. And then the next thing you know, the person's on all sorts of different medications, which come across every single day. Or I could use the medication I knew, which was alcohol, right. And that one seemed to be the better bet. And I knew I was abusing it. But I also knew that, okay, if I can't sleep, or I'm feeling a little bit anxious to depress, at least I know what to use them for. Now, I'm being relatively safe. You know, I'm not like, I'm not driving drunk around town or anything like that. I'm just using it in these capacities. And so it was one of the things of like, knowing my parents worried, but also not having any sort of, like, viable option beyond that. It was like, I know that it's not good, but like, what else am I gonna do, I don't have many choices here.

 James Geering 1:16:43

So walk me through your journey to psychedelics. And

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so I was in that situation, and like I said, I knew I wasn't in a good spot, was listening to like a Joe Rogan podcast in my free time. And you had, like, you know, was talking about ayahuasca with the guests. And, you know, when I was listening to it, I had never done psychedelics never had an interest in even that podcast was just kind of somebody's like, Trip Report, didn't really appeal to me beyond just being an entertaining podcast to listen to, right. But in my mind, it was like, Okay, well, how was me fighting a dragon, you know, help any of this stuff I'm going through. But for whatever reason, it's it planted the seed, right? So when I did that, being bored at work, just kind of looking more into it, started hearing like other stories, started seeing the other things. And I think the thing that allowed my brain to even consider it was I was always kind of like, mindful and not doing like drugs, I didn't consider myself a drug user. And, you know, doing mushrooms in somebody's basement or with a friend seemed like that would change who I was right. And that would make me this drug user. And then adding more vices to already, you know, the one I was struggling with, whereas with the Ayahuasca there was a traditional cultural dynamic to it. So it was less about doing drugs recreationally, it was about engaging in the tradition with culture that dates back 1000s of years. And so for, I think it was that sort of slight that sort of uniqueness that allowed me to even approach it. And then the more I approached it, as things progress, became pretty clear that I was done with that job. The more I was in a situation, the more is just like, This is not filling me. You know, the fortunate thing about the corporate world is I can see each tier of like, okay, my supervisor, he's not happy and overworked. Okay, her supervisor, that person's been overworked. Okay, the guy that's next to the CFO, he just wants to be CFO, but he's like not even seeing his kids. So I was like, Oh, well, none of this is intriguing to me. And so I'm just like, Okay, this is not the spot for me. I need to find something else. So it was already like, preparing of changing that. And then it was like, Okay, well, I already travel a lot. And so I knew I was in this toxic bubble. And so for me, a good idea was just to get out of it and sort of figure it out and reassess, you know, of

course, and by that time I had gotten out debt, save some money, had some, some flexibility in terms of at least like starting afresh. So I was like, alright, well, why not? Haven't been studied abroad in South America before. Let's go back. I loved it when I did it. Let's do this. And then I signed up for an Ayahuasca retreat is like, Okay, well, I have no idea what this is gonna do. But at least it's sort of the start of this. So started planning it started doing due diligence. This is 2016 It's cheap. ain't just night and day, then there really wasn't a lot of resources you could go to that would tell you what a good Oscar cheat was, you kind of have to use your senses. And so I found one that I trusted and gave my two weeks notice which ended up being you know, that three months just because I was on some bigger projects, and started planning and then essentially sold the stuff I didn't need, packed up all the other stuff and bought a one way ticket to Peru.

 James Geering 1:20:30

So you've been in this journey, you obviously had anxiety, when you're younger, you transition out the military, you identify some other areas where you're leaning into alcohol, you go to the VA, and sadly, yes, at this story I've heard over and over and over again, and it's the machines are amazing people within the VA, but it's just like, you know, physicians are some great physicians, but the structure they work in doesn't set them up for success. What because I know you had a series of ayahuasca experiences kind of walk me through that metamorphosis from whatever was driven down and hidden coupled with as you said, the the micro TBI, and you know, coming out the other end.

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Yeah, so getting from there, and then just going there at the moment, I was on a plane to Peru, and like landed, I was just like, I'm, I felt like, even that was the weight off of my shoulders. And you know, just even in that initial days, I was able to kind of look back and like, that was starting to get pretty bad. I'm glad I left that I was, you know, as anxious of going into the spot, especially because I essentially just tanked my financial prospects, my financial career. But it's also that faith itself was that trust and self of like, Hey, you're, you'll figure it out, you know, you can, as long as you have some sort of that freedom, you can figure out some other stuff and maybe engage in other things that are engaging or read about your travels, or what have you, I didn't really know specifically, but I knew that I had to get out of that spot. So once this Ayahuasca retreat, super nervous, so thinking I was crazy, I didn't tell any of my family just because I didn't want that sort of fear sort of thing. And especially with the fear already around the alcohol, like now he's going to do drugs and through that's not a good sign. I was going there, essentially, they knew I was traveling, obviously, but they thought I just kind of needed a break. So went there, went to this, you know, super deep in the jungle retreat center is beautiful, the people are super nice. And I was just like, Okay, I don't know what this is never had them psychedelics. And it was a week long, five traditional Ayahuasca ceremonies. And, you know, just went in. The first one happens at night with ceremonies, you know, the last four to five hours you take, it's in a liquid form, you drink it. And, you know, within 30 minutes, it was off to the races, just what you'd read about in terms of typical psychedelic experiences of geometric patterns. You know, things move in, I knew I was still in the room, but it was just like, opened, my eyes are closed my eyes, there's all sorts of gears and colors and everything else going on. And it brought up everything but not in a tangible way of just bringing up all this anxiety, all the fear, essentially, in a room where I'm just living in it have a manifestation of

that. So the visuals were just this like, change, you know, this thing that was hard to settle down. And with Ayahuasca to the purging sort of thing, so you're puking or shivering, I just couldn't sit still. I was like, sweating. I was puking every minute. I was just like, I have no idea what's going on. And it just was every form of physical and mental uncomfotability that you can possibly imagine. So you know, eventually it pays off. And the healers the shaman are singing during it, which can make it more intense than got to have that was like, Okay, I had no idea what that was. Within that it I think it did give me some sort of respect for it. Like it wasn't this happy go lucky. retreat where, you know, we had fun doing psychedelics and cool. It was this thing that just literally kicked my ass in every way. And I think coming from that major Ranger thing with although like, elections and training, you're kind of used to that thing where it's like afterwards you feel good about it, even though most miserable thing while you're doing it. And so I think I was like, alright, much respect. Let's see what round two holds. And so one into the next night. And where I thought it couldn't get worse. I thought I was gonna like figure it out. Some people had some good experiences. It was 10 times not 100 times worse was just like, one of those things. Are you just so miserable, you're counting the seconds. And then when I was counting the seconds, it took my perception of time away from me. So I couldn't even count the seconds of how long it was going. And it was just the most like all out battle of just fearing losing my consciousness and sanity. And you know, people were like, oh, maybe you are about to, but it's all it's bringing your fears to the most, to where you have to actually face up to where you're just tired of working with them. And so whatever you're fearing, oftentimes pushes you that because it's that friction point until you're really willing to like, let go of it. And you're like, Okay, this doesn't serve me, I don't need any more. But sometimes you, especially for us hard headed people, you need to kind of come to that spot where you're gonna push, push, push, and then just surround you by it until there's that relief, the guy the second one and had the fear of God in my eyes, for sure. And I was just like, writing a letter to my parents, just in case of like, I'm sorry, I did this and I end up in a mental hospital, like, please, understandable, blah. And so there's a day of wrath of that allowed me to see other people had similar harsh experiences, which gave me a little bit of a relief that wasn't just me. But it wasn't him. I'm like a reaction to it. And so then, you know, go into the third, but like, taking like many others, and like almost puking them touches my mouth. I was like, I don't know what's gonna happen with this one. Like, if it gets any worse. I don't know how that's I don't know, how it's possible to handle if it got worse. Like, that's how bad I felt it was. Go back to my little corner. And then lo and behold, it started off just as bad. And it was just like starting to kick in. I was like, Oh, God, I don't know how I'm gonna survive this night. And so when I was starting to get there, and I was just puking again. And then this hand reached out, like, you know, hallucinogenic and told me and then almost instantaneously my physiological self changed in terms of like what I was feeling right again, like I kind of knew where I was but was just completely in it where before I was sweating and heart rate all up and just chaos and just couldn't sit still afterwards is just body completely still heart rate down so cool, fill the cool breeze and was just surrounded by like this tropical paradise. It was just the most like chill, relaxed thing you could possibly imagine. I was like, What the hell happened? I was just like, sitting in there. Like, this is nice. But then is that that self sabotaging thing in your brain? Or that anxiety hook that just reels you right back in? It was that thought about? Well, what if I go back in the moment I thought that sent me right back into the hellscape. So the rest of that night was like back and forth, back and forth. And in that way, it was almost like teaching me to move past that, like, those negative thinking or that that anxiety loop that I was getting caught in before that had so much prominence in my life, to where the end I finally like ended up in that like calm spot, but still sort of exhausted. But it was a victory, right? Like I had gotten past the harshness and then the fourth night started off a little bit rocky, but I was able to spend most of it in just sort of a calm chill. Like thing where just had a lot of almost connecting me to that inner warrior feeling that that chest feeling that I hadn't felt in a while where it just felt, I

don't know, it's hard to explain but like noble like, belong, like, this is what I'm supposed to do this where I'm where I'm at, and had some messages to afterwards were no like nervous about, like I said, taking my financial career. That's where one of the realizations came. It was like, Hey, if you were right back to where you were, or if you knew exactly what the next step is, because I was like, what's, what's my next step? What's my next path, and it was like, if you knew exactly what you you were supposed to do, or whatever, then then you'd be bored again, and you'd go right back into the depression and drinking like the whole point of life is for you, especially that you need to be stimulated, you need to be challenged, you need to be creative and figuring out what challenges do come if you just had everything laid out for you, then you would go back into that. That gave me some you know, like calmness about that like, Okay, I don't know what I'm going to do next, but I have the skill set to make it possible right. So then that was the last ceremony and after that it was like exhausted, but it did feel like you know it was it was exercising or was showing me a part of my brain to where when getting in those negative thought loops. I was able to bypass that remove it. It was almost like, like flexing that muscle that I didn't know I had to wear even afterwards. When I was starting to have panic attacks. I could Oh my Just think back to that and flex that and move past it. And then it felt like, this is pretty common, like a weight had been lifted off, like I felt lighter, I felt, you know, much more refreshed from the brain perspective. It really felt like my brain was functioning together as a cohesive unit for the first time in a long time. We're on past reflection, I think because of the TBI. It felt like it was just like this discordant like, like your computer. They were sometimes that works. Sometimes it doesn't. But there's like Miss firings, and it just leaves you on this, like manic behavior, or is afterwards like, Oh, this is Jesse, this is a brain that's actually meant to help me out not meant to, you know, fuck me up. And so it was just this, this whole sort of thing. I was like, what, what just happened. And the other thing is, like, all these other stories of people go in there for depression and add, and they're all finding relief, and it was a pretty magical spot. And so then coming from there, you know, I was still traveling, I was trying to figure out what what was next. But it was just like, wow, this was something.



1:31:12

And, you know, I was just trying to figure out, okay, what, what the next steps were for me? And how do I utilize these these gifts that I just got? Because again, back at that time, there was no like programmatic support, there is not, they give you some tips of like, Hey, stay on this path. But there's not much beyond that.



James Geering 1:31:31

So firstly, before we get to heroic hearts, that was your acute experience? What happened on the kind of more chronic side? As far as Did you see the impact of your experiences continue to heal you as you progress through even though you weren't actively doing them anymore?



1:31:51

Yeah, absolutely. I just felt like I wasn't caught up as much in you know, certain like, before, just be, like I said, almost more manic, we're probably gonna be going wrong. And then I'd have this bright idea of like, Oh, I'm going to spend all my time on this, but then it'd be a stupid idea, then, like, move back, and then it just wouldn't progress. I went, I ended up going back to

Tampa a few A little while later. And, you know, went back to like, one of the bars or 10. And I realized when I was there, like something was missing. And that missing thing was before, I'd have to take like, a few drinks just to like calm down from the social anxiety or the hyper vigilance. And when I was there, I was still at like peace, you know? And I was like, oh, like, I should be anxious now. But I'm not, you know, and so like, do I need to have a drink? No, I guess I don't like I'm cool. You know. And so it's like little things like that, where it's just how I reacted differently. And then even, you know, my parents notice sort of a difference. So just a lightness coming from and just how I interacted. And I think just, yeah, just how my brain operated to it just didn't go back into those old patterns. So it was just an ever progressing kind of thing where it was fine tuning me back through a potential that I hadn't been at for quite a while.

 James Geering 1:33:11

So talk to me about the genesis of heroic hearts.

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So continue to travel around, I was doing these like work ways where I was just working at various shop, like spots and exchange for room and board and just traveling and, again, figuring out what the next step was. And more and more as you know, as I kept hearing, you know, friends that had were taking their lives or friends that were extremely struggling. And I had just come from this pretty, you know, amazing thing. And in my mind is like, you know, I don't know if this is for everybody. But it would be nice if I had been informed about this, right? And there's so many other people that they should at least know, right, like, they should at least have this information. And the more I talked to buddies that were out are still in, I thought they're all going to be like No, but that's crazy. And a lot of them were like, hey, that's crazy. But most of them were like, Hey, man, if it works, it works. And I found that to be the general attitude of that sort of military attitude of if you don't choose the tools you have, but you have to use the tools on the ground and, and figure it out and complete the mission. And more and more just kind of cemented in this idea of hey, became this obligation almost where I kept having these ideas, this idea of like, did you just stumble onto something yourself that others could benefit from? And given your background? You have the power to make something out of it? And both of those were Yes. And I was like, Okay, well, you kind of have an obligation to try something to do something. And so did research and again, saw that there was no like, Veteran Program or real veterans talking about this. And I would have been served by more preparation. I would have been served by some tips and tricks on the tail end to maximize it. And so I just kind of put it out there I was in Columbia and a small internet cafe in the middle of nowhere. And was just Google searching on a slow ass computer. How do you start a nonprofit found Squarespace and started building a really shitty first version of the website and went on Legal Zoom to figure out what a nonprofit or what I should do. And just little by little, I put it out there and created it, and wrote the whole nonprofit application myself, which was like, very careful in the language. So the IRS would approve it. And to my surprise, they did. And so to my knowledge is like the first nonprofit connecting veterans to psychedelics in that capacity. And one of the things has been a nonstop grind, because this was like teeth out early 2017. And this landscape has changed a lot. But it's also good because things drastically changed in 2018 2019. So I kind of got perspective of both sides where nobody was talking about and nothing was moving. And just a lot of cold calls were people were hanging up on the other end to a lot



of people wanting to talk about it. So give me that perspective. And, you know, the universe kind of guided it to where it was a nonstop drive. But I met the right people at the right time, ended up moving to MyTeam quickly found two people, one who was a veteran himself that could help support it in different capacities, we were able to send our first veteran group within a couple of months of starting it, which is pretty crazy. And then I also being on a healthier path and being more purpose driven and not self destructive. I also then met my now wife, who went on a few dates. And, you know, we started slow, but that turned into to something else. But I also don't think I would have been able to find or sustain that relationship had I been in the previous mentality. Because you know, when you're in a trauma state, you find traumatized individuals. And so yeah, I mean, hurl carts, that's kind of what it created. And we created one of the first of its kind programs where veterans come in, we do intake, we assess if it's the right thing for them, safety wise, and others, then we do four to six weeks preparation, we have partnerships with retreat centers that are trusted, they've been doing this for quite a while. And then we do what they call integration. So hopefully, you have a pretty profound experience, the vast majority walk away with pretty profound impacts 90 plus percent. But you still need to do the work, you still need to implement tool like systems in your life. So you have to have discipline. It's not just enough saying, hey, I want to change my life yet, I actually have to do it. And so that's what we're we've been trading and been able to partner with different universities for research and new policy to change it. And it's really just come a beast of its own. And so transition from me pushing the car up the hill to me, you know, chasing the car before it gets away.

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James Geering 1:38:12

Beautiful. We I mean, when you talk about the timeline that is probably around the time I even even heard this as a conversation, you know, so here we are now. And obviously there's some more well known organizations now, which as you said, is a bonus. I mean, we we need lots of lots of groups out there to take care of our people. But it's amazing hearing all these success stories. And I've had so many people sadly, some of them actually passed away since dancer alone has a Navy SEAL who went through vets I think it was, but he was like full on alcoholism. And almost overnight through obviously, the series of experiences that he had, he never touched a drop again. It was incredible. So Keegan talked about doing a variety of different psychedelics prior, but it was the Boga that really was a game changer for me. So are you offering a spectrum then depending on on the person's experience and what route they want to take?

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1:39:08

Yeah, I mean, it's still kind of early, we're very much early in how we figure it out. And there's no one size fits, all right. So if you, whether through life, or through your inclination, are drawn to oneness, and as long as you're healthy, like as long as physically and mentally you're a good fit. I do not believe you're gonna make the wrong choice. It's not like oh, shit, I took mushrooms and I'll like that was completely wrong. I should have taken Ayahuasca right. As long as you're doing the preparation, you're right set and setting and you're healthy. You're gonna get messages, they each deliver the messages differently, and how we view it. It's just it's sort of the start of your, your mental health journey. So some people just take a big experience and they never look back. Other people they need to dig deeper and they might use different messengers, or different tools for that purpose. Generally Speaking we'll find more with

Ayahuasca Ibogaine, because those tend to be kind of the heavier hitters, they're a little bit more intense experience experiences, each intense in their own very unique, bone crushing ways. But each have great power to help heal and deliver more understanding to yourself. The reason we do that, with veterans in particular is because we do, there's different ways to use psychedelics as well. But we do very specific trauma work with these. And so that requires specific protocols and how you use them and set ups and all that kind of stuff. And because those are more intense, veterans tend to be veterans, first responders like yourself, the people that are like running towards the fire, tend to be very good at one, understanding pain and going into the pain. They tend to be hard headed enough to where they'll decide to do that at times. But they also are very good at compartmentalizing, right? They do a lot of it. And that's what makes them people of service is that they are they're willing to carry the weight of the world on themselves. And they have oftentimes the strength, they just don't have the tools to not carry that to relieve themselves of it. And so the harder, more intense experiences are, at this point, help those people break through because they really need that kind of kick in the ass, but also that like more intense experience to really get to the root of it. And to open it up. And to help help process we hope to get to the spa. I mean, right now we're potentially in a triage state where everybody's been traumatized for decades of their life and trying to overcome just a very broken healthcare systems. Or we're kind of coming to the spotlight in the game where everybody's already been traumatized for so long that we're trying to break through to get them some sort of peace. But ideally, the the point is to get ahead of it, right. So we're when some of the stuff comes initially, or somebody has a traumatic event, or what have you early earlier on, then we can, we don't necessarily need to go as intense. So we can help them learn tools and utilize these substances in a very effective and safe way.

J

James Geering 1:42:13

So one thing I've talked about for a long time now on here, and it's really because I saw it with my own eyes as a firefighter paramedic, and all the ripple effect deaths and suffering from the war on drugs from the prohibition of alcohol, excuse me, the prohibition of drugs, which was following the epic failure of the prohibition of alcohol. One of the lesser discussed elements of this epic failure is the fact that we have men and women who fought for this country that have to go to other countries to get a very effective treatment for their service for their you know, their TBI is in their PTSD, etc. What is your perspective of what you understood? You know, our generation you said about being the Dara generation? This is your brain on drugs? You know, now we're in 2023. What is your kind of perception of these drug laws? And what if you could be king for a day should we do to allow us to do all these treatments on our actual home soil?

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1:43:12

Yeah, I mean, just in general, I think it's ridiculous that the plants are illegal, like it grows on the ground, and like you can I can go out and forage toxic mushrooms, and that's not necessarily illegal or grow them, but having one that just makes you, you know, trip, candy, you know. And so, I mean, anybody who reads the the drug policy laws and how they came into place, like it's bad policy, it's bad law. It's driven by all sorts of different things, racism, control, fear, all sorts of some are justified, some are absolutely not, some are pretty, pretty gross. And at the end of day, it's kind of like some of the other topics it's control. Right? It's, it's, and possibly some money side of it, too, with some of these organizations that we mentioned before, though, I mean, it's, it's it needs to change. It's a embarrassment, it's an embarrassment, from law

perspective, that they're even there. It just makes you lose faith and that kind of stuff. I don't even need to go into comparison. I mean, the fact that something like cannabis that everybody now recognizes has some sort of medical benefit is still scheduled one, whereas some other harder drugs or not, or even comparison to alcohol, it's it's a ludicrous system. I want to you know, I want to approach it cautiously. It's I mean, like, if somebody is growing a non, if somebody's growing psilocybin in their, in their house, I don't think anybody should be arrested for that, right. If somebody has like, their own personal use of these psychedelics, there's no reason they should be arrested, and oftentimes, it leads to other things. It's not even about the psychedelic it's still tricky, I think because we've been because we have a shitty it's an infrastruc Sure thing, like, there's so many systems that are not built, it's not just not having the psychedelic, it's, you know, understanding how to use them. And allowing for proper, not proper access, but access that is relatively safe. I feel like if you just flooded everything like tomorrow, everything's legal. I don't think it'd be the worst thing in the world. But I think you could avoid a lot of pain and issue. So I think there's great policies that are coming out right now, like in Oregon and Colorado, where as long as people get certain certifications and spots, get certain certifications, there's, you know, religious exemptions, for people who use a sacrament and all this kind of stuff, they'll be able to go either see a physician, or they can go and for Community Center and do this in group therapy, to keep the cost down and all that kind of stuff. But then you also know that the person that's leading it has some sort of understanding how to do this in the emergency situation. No, no, no, with all are aware with all. But I think, just from not from nothing to all, can be problematic, but there's ways of progressively moving this forward. And so if I had that magic wand, that's what I do, like across it have not only increased funding on Freeth research to sort of, let's go to the moon level sort of money in flux, and let's train people, let's get the VA on board, let's develop programs and community centers that give this local low economic communities access to this and in the community centers and all that kind of stuff. I mean, it's, it really would be a very cost effective and not that hard thing to approach to do this in a very safe, reasonable spot.

J

James Geering 1:46:41

See, I agree 100%, Portugal had amazing success and actually went and sat with the gentleman who spearheaded that in Lisbon a few years ago, and it's not about being able to buy meth on, you know, in your supermarket, it's about taking addiction, not selling, not smuggling, but addicts, and taking them out of the criminal system, putting them in the medical system, you know, so when you've got someone who's battling, you know, whatever trauma that they got from childhood, serving in corrections, dispatch, military, whatever it is, and now they they have found with a substance you don't throw them in prison, you bring them into the, you know, the comfort of a place where they can heal, they can address that trauma where they can address the the addiction that they've got. And then you also don't give them a criminal record, which is a barrier to entry to employment and purpose. You know, so, we've, we've messed it up for so long, and we say, oh, you know, what's happening on our streets? We'll look at drug prohibition. gangbangs aren't out there slinging, you know, ice cream, there's a reason that there's drugs on every corner while looking at our borders, same fucking thing. The Mexican cartels weren't there until we empowered them the same way as no one knew who Al Capone was, till we made alcohol illegal. So we have all these lessons. And as you said, We're war. We keep getting these, these these lessons from history that nothing is solved by war. You know, it isn't just lots of dead people, ultimately. But it's when the few try and control the masses that these problems have if we don't push back, and I think this is another paradigm shift that we need to get to is finally say, Look, this prohibition on drugs has been a fucking epic failure. We have a mental health crisis, we have a Violence Crisis, we have children

shooting children in our schools, we have people, you know, all this violence at the border. And this would all be solved if we took mental health and treated it with compassion and kindness, instead of thinking that we can arrest our way out of this problem. And if the very men and women that served and protect this country, have to go overseas, then there's your mission as a member of as an American citizen, is to rectify that. So these very treatments that we're finding so much success that we have to go to foreign countries to get, we bring those back onto our own soil.



1:48:56

Yeah, absolutely. Extremely well said and, you know, highlights and that's one of the the missions of heroic Hearts project that we're really leaning into in the future. It's not just connecting that to these other countries. But, you know, we have been leading that and are, you know, understanding how this works in real time, which is, which is pretty unique in this space. But also, it's not just switching an SSRI for a mushroom, right? It's understanding why the system failed in the first place on many different levels. Like what do we need change in mental health? What do we need to change in drug development or drug approval? What do we need to change in the VA and, and health and therapy? Right, and so one of the big things we're doing is the psychedelics are not going to solve everything, but we need to build the infrastructure that encourages that. And so we're really going to develop these communities systems, where it empowers local community to be safe and effective and use these in the best way possible. So somebody is in, you know, Tampa, Florida or North Carolina and they can go to a local spot. It's called is defective, but they also know that the person running it has some semblance of understanding of what they're doing. And they can look at that or to a different degree, maybe it's as more of a medical side if that's what they want. But we're really pushing and leaning into this peer support system, because that's the other side of it is, we've been led to believe that every single mental health you need to go to a psychotherapist or psychiatrists, whereas we come from a community support system, we've lost these community systems. And we see that with veterans of what they come out and big problems isolation, we need to rebuild those, we need to use the tools of psychedelics to give them powerful tools to overcome it. But at the end of the day, most of the healing is coming from being together, and having community to support you to hold you accountable, to follow up with you, and to provide you other resources, that is just not possible by yourself. And so there's these huge sort of things that on the paradigm shift to psychedelics we can really work on. But it's a much bigger, more complex problem, but still simple at the same time that we need to focus in on. So that's why I don't like people just like, Oh, this one mushroom is going to solve everything, right? It's the bigger thing than that, but it's actually going to be far more effective, far more beautiful. And get back to our the answers are always the simplest, like the more we try to make things complicated, it always goes back to our roots, right? Breathe well, eat well, exercise, have family, have community, sometimes get together around the fire and sing songs. You know, if you have those basic things, you're going to be a much better person.



James Geering 1:51:36

So everything they told us not to do the last two years. Yeah, exactly. Exactly. Johann Hari has a phrase, the opposite of addiction is connection. And I agree 100%. So you bring these you give someone a toolbox that may or may not include psychedelics, equine therapy, EMDR, you know, maybe even psychiatric meds, if that's appropriate for that particular person. And then

you involve community, and you have that space where people can come and be amongst their peers, and then find their own particular journey. I think that is the answer. But like you said, the pill for an ill mentality, even with plant medicine is a wrong way of looking at it, too. Yeah, absolutely. All right. So for people listening, where can they find heroic hearts who, you know, would be eligible for help? And then who, how can people also support from a financial side?

 1:52:30

Yeah, so we, you know, we have a huge demand, we're trying to work on expanding it, especially community development people, projects we're doing that we're developing this year in Oregon and other states, we want to have first responders and veterans right now for our main programs overseas, it's combat that so combat related trauma or military sexual trauma are the ones we have to focus on just the sheer demand. So we are trying to expand it. So if you have one of those, you can apply on our website, heroic hearts project.org. And we have an application and we'll get back to you quickly, you know, needs to have relative health, physical health, not history of major mental health issues. You know, we're still pretty early in this. So we have to work within the infrastructure that we have. But we're here to build community too. So it's not like we're gonna just kick you to the curb. So we're on most social media, I think we've kind of almost abandoned Facebook. I think it's like going down I don't know for we're gonna see about Twitter, too. But Instagram seems to be the best one right now. I agree. So heroic hearts. project.org is the the main way, pro cards project, or hero cards project. And then the.org is the website, we just got our Wikipedia page. So you can go check that out if you're really into nerding out on it. And then yeah, most important, this is a nonprofit, 501 C three, all of our ability of research and supporting vets. stems from generosity has stemmed from people who are willing to help us and I do think we're one of the most efficient, effective organizations out there in terms of making substantial change on a systematic basis. So you can donate either website, pro cards, project, forward, slash donate, or reach out to us. However you want to support, that's always helpful. Each veteran cost about 5000 for us to support, but there's many different expensive ways to help from there. So if you do have the ability, even, you know, a few dollars helps out.

 James Geering 1:54:34

You for I would just say I want to say thank you so much. I'm gonna say thank you to Kagan again for connecting us but it's been amazing to hear your journey and you know, obviously even that multi generational discussion I think it's a very important part of this puzzle as well. But there's so many people I think that have found themselves in desperation and what's beautiful is so many people that come on the show were like here is this dark place I was in I was drinking too much. I had a gun in my mouth, you know, whatever it was, but then They found the thing, or the combination of the things that we say so for you to tell your story out the other side. But then as so many of these people, these guests that come on then find a way to even give and serve more through nonprofits and things like that. It's amazing. It really is. So I want to thank you so much for being so generous with your time today.

 1:55:20

I appreciate it. And thank you for given the platform and having this great conversation. I do like Lee approach it and I hope your audience is very receptive to it. But, you know, again, this

is a community it takes the people that sharing the message and it takes the whole different pieces of the puzzle to make this actually change. So I appreciate it.