Real Life Spider-Man Beat Stage 4 Cancer (Must See Interview) Transcript

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Spider-Danu2019s Plant-Based Background

I'm sitting here today with a man whose life story sounds like a Hollywood movie script. Some of you may recognize the name Spider-Dan, the guy who famously scaled the Sears Tower and the World Trade Center in the 1980s dressed as Spider-Man. Well, 25 years after those world record stunts, he faced a stage four cancer diagnosis and used that same skyscraper mentality to beat it. Dan Goodwin is 70-years old, he's fully plant-based, he's elite-level fit, and he's here with us today.

Dan, thank you so much for joining me today. Thank you, Clark, for inviting me. How did I not know you were into lifestyle medicine, and how did I not know about your story? >> I've been a vegan on and off my entire life. And so, a lot of people didn't realize that when I climbed my first building, the Sears Tower, which was the world's tallest building at the time, everyone wanted to know, "What did you have in the water bottles?" Well, one bottle had V8 juice and spirulina, which is a plant-based protein powder, and cayenne pepper, and I had that shaken up, and that was my energy drink, and still is. But, I had on and off through my entire life realized that the plant-based diet was for me. I just felt better, I felt more energy, I don't crave anything, I I'm not going through the day hungry, I'm not like craving junk food, I'm not craving anything. So, I go through the day and I have so much energy and at the end of this day here, I got like a posse of guys coming over to my place, and we're going to have a climbing session on my climbing wall in my backyard. And so, it works. The plant-based diet gives you energy, and if you really think about it, the reason why it does, you're actually getting the energy from the plants. The plants absorb energy from the sun, they absorb energy from the earth, and you eat it, guess what you're getting? All that energy. That's what fueled me up the world's tallest buildings. So, connecting with you now with the past time, what strikes me is just how healthy you look, and we'll we'll talk about the the cancer diagnosis and recovery. So many questions really about the climbing, like did you always see plants as an advantage to your climbing career? See, when you're a climber, it's kind of like being a gymnast or a dancer, where you actually have to watch your body weight. So, if you're a type of person that really wants to maintain a lean physique, the plant-based diet works.

And so, I I found that just to keep my body weight where I wanted, the plant-based diet was it. >> Yeah, because you're so lean going up those things, you know, like Have you seen that Alex Honnold, the climber recently? Is he Is he plant-based as well? So, is this a >> He's plant-based as well. Yeah, so what's going on here? Is this just a coincidence? I think there's something to it.

Why Climbing and Veganism Fit Together

There's a lot of athletes out there who have discovered that, you know, people say, "Oh, you know, if you want to be strong as an ox," you know, you hear that phrase, and you go, "Well, are you aware that an ox is plant-based?" And they look at you and they go, "I never thought about it that way." But it's it's so true. So, like with Alex Honnold, you know, he's he's been a vegan for very much the same reasons. And I can't speak for him, obviously, but for myself and for a lot of climbers that are into that, especially if you're going to be free soloing and you're going to be putting your life on the line, it's not just the food that you're eating in terms of like I got into a touch with a little bit about, you know, you're absorbing the energy from the sun, you're absorbing the energy from the earth. You're almost like you're coming one with the universe in a way. You're like more in tuned to what's going on around you. So, when I on a plant-based diet, I put my life on the line, it's not like I'm going up and I'm sluggish because I got all this meat in me and all this garbage food, it kind of like affects your thoughts. So, if you want to have nice, clean, healthy thoughts, I found that the plant-based diet just seemed to really refine my thoughts and my ability to keep my mind focused and tuned. It really helps. >> So, what goes through your mind when you're, you know, hanging off the world's tallest buildings? I imagine, and this is maybe listening to Alex Honnold's, you know, interviews recently, it's a very relevant topic given Netflix partnered with him. I mean, it's great timing for your book, by the way. Anybody listening, check out the link down below. Your book's out, which probably covers some of this. But day-to-day, I imagine you're not in a state of fear, but there must have been several times each year during your peak years where you're just unbelievably frightened. But tell us about that kind of double-edged sword of that fear. Does it drive you, but then it scares you? Every day do you get it, or is it just in the the big achievements that

you've done? Like talk me talk me through that that concept and topic of fear. Great question because a lot of people ask that question where I know. People want to know, "What are you thinking?" Well, to quote Shrek with you, I'm not thinking anything. My mind is pretty much blank. It is like you're so into the zone that everything around you almost disappears. You're like almost in the twilight zone where you're just so focused on each and every move because when you're climbing without a rope, whether it's a rock face or a building, you don't have a margin of error. Zero.

You make one mistake, even the slightest mistake, and it's all over. You got to be so focused on what happens. You know, it's like, "Yes, there is fear cuz there are our times on each of my buildings since for example on the Sears Tower, you'll find out in the book that on the 63rd floor and I don't want to get into it, my suction cups when I was trying to traverse away from the window wash machine, which was trying to apprehend me. My suction cups failed. The winds were blowing over 50 miles an hour. I'm 53 floors up, and fear is something that comes at you like a tidal wave. And it can either make you panic and freeze, or it can do just the opposite. And for me, I've learned how to harness fear. Alex talks about it differently. He says he's not afraid. A unique thing. And for me, I actually have to say that most of the time I'm not afraid because my mind is so focused, but when something happens, it motivates me and gives me more energy. All the endorphins, the adrenaline, all kicks in. And suddenly, I go from being just strong and healthy and fit to all of a sudden superhuman.

Fear is not something I'm afraid of. Actually, I've learned to embrace it. I know that when I get up there, I something's going to happen.

Fear, Focus, and Free Soloing

Like, for example, in the John Hancock, the civil defense fire commissioner ordered his men to turn the fire hose on me, and they almost knocked me off. And he What on earth were they thinking? His intention was to kill me. He actually had threatened to kill me after the first building, told me that if I ever tried climbing another building in this city, he'd kill me. And at the time, I have to say, I never even thought about climbing another building. I was just so grateful I made it up the first building. And so, when he told me that, suddenly it it triggered something inside me. And I said, my first response was, "Then I'll give you a call." And he looked at me and said, "I'm going to climb another building." I knew then I was going to climb another building. I just didn't know which building it was going to be. So, when they turned the fire hose on me, I knew he was trying to kill me, cuz he already told me that he would kill me. Talk about adrenaline. I was fighting for my life. I literally was fighting for my life. I really thought I was going to come off. So, fear is not something that people should be afraid of. In fact, I tell people to embrace it. For me, fear is my ally. It's not something that I fear. In fact, it's something that motivates me every single day. For example, I'm so fearful of getting cancer again, that it keeps me cleaner than clean on my diet. It keeps me cleaner than clean in my thoughts and everything that I do. I want my karma perfectly clean and aligned. And so, fear is not a bad thing. Fear is something that can actually make people become better. It's fear is good because often fear is associated with getting outside your comfort zone. And we know that's where growth happens. With the diet and the cancer and the fear of of cancer coming back, I can see why there's a real positive there to it. But when it comes to climbing, would you say fear is an addictive thing? If >> You hear about people saying adrenaline junkies. Most of the climbers I know are not adrenaline junkies. Cuz the adrenaline junkies are the ones that jump off cliffs, base jump, with parachutes. Yeah, definitely adrenaline junkies. It's not like it they had to train for something and they had to do anything. They had become very good at what they do. They have a tremendous amount of fear of when they go on off, obviously. A lot of them get addicted to that. So, it's completely different than climbing because it's not like when I was free soloing a cliff or free soloing a building, for example, with the CN Tower. I wasn't doing it for the adrenaline rush at all. I knew it hit me at one point. And like on the CN Tower, for example, that I free soloed both sides, you know, the first side it went really well. Second side was going really well, too, but then all of a sudden the wind was really picking up and the flag was flapping, a big Canadian flag, the world's largest Canadian flag. And I thought it was going to knock me off the side of the the top of it. So, fear works for you.

It made me just look at it like trying to pace myself where I was on I'm looking at the flag and trying to time it where I could actually get by it before it possibly flap and hit me. And so, fear works with you. Fear works with me all the time. Do you think your experience being such an accomplished kind of daredevil climber helped you recover from cancer, and if so, how? You want to talk about fear? I was absolutely terrified going through the cancer. You know, it's like there you are healthy your whole life. And for the record, I was vegan on and off my whole life. And there

was a period of time where when I was living in Lake Tahoe, cuz I was always cold, all my friends are going, "Dan, you got to put some meat on if you want to stay warm. You got to start eating more fish and chicken and stuff like that." And so, I thought, "Well, okay, I'll I'll try it." And I thought I was still eating really well because I was having with my salad I thought I ate chicken with a salad.

You know, so I was getting the protein and I didn't realize that I was actually poisoning myself. And so, when I discovered that I had cancer, I was literally shocked cuz I was with my doctor and my doctor was looking at me and going, "There is nothing wrong with you." after he's inspected me. And I said, "Can I have a second opinion?" He goes, "Well, Dan, if everyone came in looking like you." cuz I was standing there and I shirt was off, I had six-pack abs. I'm like strong looking and he looks at me and says, you know, if everyone looked like you, I'd be out of business. And so I said, well, can I have another opinion? And that's when I discovered I had cancer. It was a game-changer for me. I suddenly realized that this was something that was inside me. It wasn't something that I could control. It turned out that how you think, everything that you think, and the words you speak matters because you can you can bring it into life. And so I had to be mindful of when the doctors told me that I was stage four, that there was a 10 to 15% chance that I could survive. That wasn't a survival rate for my cancer.

Cancer Diagnosis and Recovery

I could have just latched onto the fact that most nine out of 10 people are going to die. Or I could say, I'm going to be that one that does survive. And from that point on, I switched my diet right back again because I suddenly realized I going, oh my god, I wonder if I did it. I wonder if I had something to do with it. And you know, there's obviously a genetics involved in that house. I'd actually accidentally flipped the switch and suddenly I was activating my predisposed genes cuz my grandfather had died of colon cancer and his father had died of it as well. So I had it in my family, but I thought because I was eating so well and because I was living such a healthy lifestyle, that it wouldn't affect me. And the moment I got it, all of a sudden I realized I got, oh my god, I got to do something. I had to take responsibility for it. And I started meditating and just focusing on everything I could to just have my thoughts as clean as possible. And trust me, there were times I really thought I was going to die. What year were you diagnosed? That was 2000. And when was it that is worst? When did you almost die? That year. When I found out I was stage four, you know, I had two different surgeries. I had multiple rounds of chemo where I had a fanny bag I was wearing and drug feed into my going into my heart. I was doing radiation every day.

I didn't know what was going to kill me first. I mean, you hear that, people talk about that. You know, they're not sure if the the treatments will kill them before the cancer actually does. And I definitely was that. And at one point, they actually stopped my treatments and I really thought I was going to die. I was 44 at the time. I was told to get my things in order. Were you feeling healthy when you aged 41, 42, 43? Yeah, I was, but I started feeling like there was something I couldn't put my finger on it. It was like I just seemed to be running out of energy quicker. I just kept chalking it up to age. Okay, I'm in my 40s now. I can't expect to be feeling the same that I did when I was in my 20s and early 30s. And so, I kept thinking that maybe that's all it is until I found out I had cancer and I got that's what was doing.

My body was fighting that. And and also, my stools changed. Most people probably in the plant-based diet probably have a similar experience to me. I had no issues. After my treatments, I was told that you have the same issues. You know, I had the irritable bowel syndrome going on. I had still cramps. I still had the same symptoms of the constipation, diarrhea going on. I still had the mucus on the stools and I asked the doctors, I said, "What can I do about this?" And they told me, "Dan, this is only you're going to have to live with it for the rest of your life." I said, "I don't buy that." And I just stayed on my plant-based diet and guess what? It went away. The plant-based diet cured those symptoms that I had that was cuz of the chemo and radiation. My body actually healed itself. Drinking milk and eggs and all the dairy products and everything else like that, it was just irritating my bowel. It never could heal. The moment I went to the plant-based diet, my body actually could heal and so the symptoms went away. I haven't had any since. You know, there's so many physicians, so much research in this area, right? There's such a link between animal products and cancer, whether that's bowel cancer, prostate cancer, breast cancer. Were you sort of tuning into this research more and more?

My internal medicine doctor who works with Kaiser, she was not plant-based until she took me on. And when she discovered that I was plant-based and I told her the story that I just shared with you about the irritable bowel

syndrome of curing myself, she tried the plant-based diet. It was a game-changer for her. I don't know what symptoms she actually had, but she started trying to talk to other doctors trying to get them to get onto it. He started working with Kaiser to start doing research. Their research came back, they came to the conclusion that the plant-based diet could speed up recovery. So, in all their hospitals in California now, when people go to the hospital and they come out of surgery, everything they're given is plant-based. Why? This less inflammation, faster recovery, patients feel healthier, they leave sooner. It actually not only was it a game-changer for them in terms of economically, but they had happier patients. And it actually sparked them to maybe reconsider their diet because they realized like, "Oh my god, that works." >> So, what were you doing with your climbing during these these years?

You're climbing in your early 40s before you got the cancer diagnosis. When did you start climbing after? I started climbing right away. There was a point where I could hardly walk. I had a a handicap thing and everything. I could I could literally I was so weak I could hardly walk. And I finally gave the card back and they said, "You sure you still don't you could you you're not battle the habit." I said, "No, I'm not. I refuse to be that." And I started walking, walking became hiking. My recovery was so quick. I started climbing again, not as hard as I was before and I just started slowly ramping it up. And as you'll read in the book, 10 years later, to celebrate my 10th anniversary, I decided to climb another building. You know, here I was I I like on, "Oh my god, I'm in my 50s now and I I don't know if I still have the mindset or the physical abilities." And so, I didn't know if I was capable of doing it. And for me, it was a bit of a test, but it was also a way to celebrate life.

And so, that's what I did. And my ascent of the Millennium Tower in San Francisco was being aired live on TV cuz it was on a Labor Day. I didn't realize that on holidays, it's kind of a dead media day. So, they're looking for anything to fill up the news channels. And I actually split the screen on multiple channels like CNN with President Obama. And they were showing Obama was giving his speech and on the other half of screen I was climbing the Millennium Tower. And it was unique experience because I got to inspire other cancer patients that just because you're told that you have cancer, it doesn't mean it's over.

Returning to Climbing and Life Lessons

I really wanted to send that message loud and clear. And I didn't realize at the time that there was another person that was watching. That person was Stan Lee, co-creator of Marvel Comics, of Spider-Man. Him and I had developed a relationship that you'll learn about in the book. He actually wrote the forward to the book. And he invited me years later to climb a building for him. I was super uh Stan Lee superhero TV show. And talk about full circle. At the very beginning of the book, you'll find out that he's being accused of collaborating and putting me up to climbing the world's tallest building dressed as Spider-Man. And he did And here at the end of the book, I'm in full circle, I actually climbed a building for him. Do you think you could do C pay 101? That's [clears throat] the one that was on Netflix recently with Alex Honnold. You know, the Wall Street Journal and and New York Times all asked me the same question. And uh yeah, definitely could have climbed that. I could climb that today. In terms of building climbs, it was definitely one of the easier building climbs out there. And it is not to take anything away Even Alex Honnold would admit that. So, obviously he went up an interesting route to make it good for the viewers. He was going up in the corners and the dragons. It was any bit where it would have been like, "Oh jeez, one of the dragons actually would have been a little bit nerve-racking?" Here's the difference between maybe Alex's approach and mine is that on all of my buildings, including the CN Tower in Canada, we had a different climate ethics back then. We didn't top rope a building or a free solo first. We wanted to have the purity of like walking up to the building like the CN Tower and just do it on site. You just walked up, no one cleaned it for me. I didn't climb it first on top rope.

There's videos of him top roping it. And I saw how he was doing the moves. I'm just going, "He's got this so wired." That there was actually no fear for him because he knew he could do it. He had done it many, many, many times. When I did it my buildings, I had no idea what I was going to be dealing with, how hard it would be, the moves individually. So, there was a big difference. Again, we're not taking anything away. It's just interesting different areas, right? You were doing it in the 20th century in '80s. There was no social media. There was no Netflix. So, Alex's there's probably in the contract something about how buildings built recently and none of the things are loose and we've gone up the route and we've checked that there's not going to be a tile that's going to slip off. >> Every single hold was mapped out. They had a clean clean clean. Whereas mine, everything I touched was greasy and

dirty from the filth of the, you know, the city dirt. World of a difference.

Times have changed and it's not to take anything away from what's being done now. And a lot of the reason why the difficulty of rock climbs have gotten much harder is because of the change of tactics. It's it's more acceptable to work the routes, clean the routes, and all that. But, the on site hasn't changed. In fact, it is the gold standard in the Olympics. All the lead climbers, all the boulders, they're not allowed to watch anyone else. They want it so that the climber still has to do it without watching anybody. What's your tips for people that want to get in your in your kind of shape? I presume most of your life you've been single digits body fat. Stay strictly a plant-based diet.

Stay away from sweets. I don't do any sugar at all, zero. If I have anything that's sweetener, it's stevia. I would say drink a lot of water. Every time you're hungry, have a glass of water instead. Get a person in the morning, have a glass of water. Keep drinking water. In fact, if you study any of the athletes in the professional sports, whether it's UFC, boxing, gymnastics, all of them that are trying to cut weight, to get weight, how do they get there? They'll all tell you, water other than sweating. And so, you can go to a sauna to to lose that, but all you're doing is losing the water weight. But, the sauna is actually has benefits that are beyond that. I would say be mindful of what you think, cuz what you think about you bring about. I don't know who coined that, but it is so true. So, be mindful of what you think.

>> And were you telling yourself this when you were diagnosed with stage four colon cancer? >> I don't give one more thing that I think would be very useful to everybody. We've all heard of Murphy's Law. You know, anything that can go wrong will go wrong. And I think most of our society kind of operates that way. They're just waiting for the next disaster. I operate on a completely different law. It's called Goodwin's Law, named after me. I coined it way back in the '80s when I climbed the World Trade Center. Anything that can go right will go right. I know it's playing with words. It's the art of rephrasing, but once you think about what you think about you bring about, it is so true. If you're thinking about anything that can go right will go right. The moment you start thinking that way, instead of looking for what can go wrong, you're looking for what can go right. You start thinking in terms of not the problems, but the solutions. Instead of thinking, "Oh, I got cancer. How can I get healthy?" So, for me in terms of like, "Okay, I'm I'm 70 years old. I would still like to be climbing really hard when I'm 100." So, firstly, I want to climb El Cap when I'm 100, base jump off, and have a big party in the valley. And so, I look at that and I go, "Okay, so my mind and my body is already training for that day." And I know it sounds like that, you know, "Dan, you're giving people false hope." And I'm going, "Well, what do you want me to do? Give people the opposite and tell them you're all doomed, you're all going to die? That there is no solution?" I believe just the opposite.

I think that if you truly want to live longer, having a plant-based diet and being mindful of your thoughts and embracing that kind of philosophy is the key. >> Completely agree. I think they're the two biggest factors, right? I completely agree. Plant-based diet and emotional state. Emotional state probably eclipses, probably out-trumps the plant-based diet. Thank you so much. >> It is so good chatting with you, guys.