The PTSD Nobody Talks About: Marine Sergeant Shares His Darkest Battle | Alfred Brenner | Ep. 138 Transcript

(Transcripts are generated by AI and may contain errors)

Introduction and National Canine Veterans Day

We were supposed to send 30 dogs to Iraq in 2009. They said, you guys aren't going to iraq or going afghanistan. And then everything started getting bad.

What were the injuries that you sustained? It was mostly like from the knees up. I had part of my left thigh was missing a little bit. Blew a part on my arm off and obviously my fingers.

The right arm was actually blown in half. So I'm happy to have this podcast with Alfred Renner. Alfred. Alfred Brenner is a retired US Marine Sergeant, former military police officer and canine handler who served in Afghanistan alongside his bomb detection dog, Grief.

He's the author of Surviving with Grieve, a powerful story of service, loss, and resilience after war. He's like, hey, he got in the front. So I started walking back to him.

And before I took my third step, everything just went white. It just felt like I was floating in air. I want to go into the emotional weight of losing your K9.

When I heard that nine line call, we have one kill. Like I felt the biggest hole in my heart. The worst sense of emptiness. Once you were deployed, what was a day in life with He taught me a lot about life when he was alive and what we went through together.

Our jobs are to protect the lives of the ones working over there. So my goal for the book is just to be so open about it that people can read it and just start telling their story.

Welcome to another episode of a Healthy Point of View podcast. I'm your host, Sam Tahata. And as usual, we're bringing experts from all over the world to talk about health, wellness, beauty, and mindset.

Today's podcast, We're gonna dabble into the mindset This one is, this is a unique one for me. Some of you guys already know, I had my canine, my German Shepherd, that was very close to me.

I would train when I was in the fire department with the urban search and rescue team with Milo. And I just lost my Germans Shepherd two months ago at the age of 15. It hasn't been the easiest thing.

He was a family member, still lives with me close in my heart. And today's guest, this is a Purple Heart Marine Sergeant who went out to Afghanistan with his dog, Grief.

And this story is going to be very touching. We're going be touching about mental health, about his book, Surviving with Grieve. And this is something that we have to think about, especially on a day like today.

Today is National Canine Veterans Day. So I'm happy to have this podcast on this National Veterans Day with Alfred Brenner. Alfred. Let's go. So those are not sound effects.

That's real. It's a real thing. Real chicken, real bell. I didn't mean to spoil it for the world, but yes.

Alfred Brenner's Upbringing and Path to the Marines

You know, but there that's awesome. I mean that day gets me amped up. Yeah, man Yeah We got to start off with the right in there. Thank you so much. So Alfred men.

Welcome to a healthy point of view podcast. Thanks you again. Appreciate it It's a it's pleasure and an honor to have you here, you know especially on a day like today, which is a date that Is very you?

Know very close to your heart, right? It is national Canine Veterans Day. Yes, sir. Yep, and You know, obviously you went through Your and we'll get into it your whole story, you know you've been a canine handler Going into the military to the Marines so I could relate to a lot of this stuff that you were involved in You now I come from a family of first responders of military my oldest brother Santiago Marine Corps first ground troops into Iraq You know, he saw a tremendous amount of stuff.

You obviously I'm seven years younger than him. So I was at home in high school and, you know I saw another side of it. I started the side my parents dressed in every single day when he was off to war.

And this is back then when there weren't really cell phones. Oh yeah. My mom literally sat next to the landline phone and waited for his phone call to make sure he's OK.

So I can only imagine some of the things that you've gone through. And those are some things I want to go into the details so people understand the other side of world that people don't see on a day to day basis.

When it comes to military, first responders, there's a trauma side to it. So but before we get into all of that, man, I want to get to know who Alfred is.

You know, always say, let's go back from when you were like five years old. What was your upbringing? What wasn't like? And how did it lead you to where you're at today?

OK. Yeah. So I think my upbringing We won't spend too much time on because luckily and God willing, it was boring. I grew up mom, dad, I was the oldest of three other brothers and sisters.

So of course, you know, as a golden child, couldn't do anything wrong, and I always doing things right. We went to Catholic school, so there's a lot of structure there.

We were raised very well, going to church, 90s suburban kid, riding bikes, cartoon stuff. So then we get to the eighth grade and we're like, where do we go to high school?

And then it was again, small school. And a bunch of us continued to do the Catholic school thing. We went to Catholic school again and I went a school that, you know, a very, very good school, but they always promoted like a hundred percent acceptance to college, right?

That was their big selling point. You know we want everyone to go to College and you, know sophomore, junior year you start to get a little serious about it.

They say, hey, what are you going to do with your life? And you definitely don't know. You know, nobody knows at that age. Um, so I, uh, you know interesting enough, I was like an artist, like I like to draw, it was very creative.

I thought outside the box all the time. It was really good at everything, but not good enough to be like the best at something, if that makes sense, right?

Like I love basketball, But certainly wasn't Duncan, and I wasn' t throwing a hundred miles an hour as a pitcher. So like, i was just good Enough to do it.

And then I realized, well, I don't know. I want to go to college and waste all this money, you know, and stuff. So talk to the recruiter. You know I didn't come from a military family.

so I talked to recruitor. He goes, we'll pay for your college, let you travel the world. And so that's what I did. and I signed up to be a Military Policeman because I figure if I'm going to do anything I wanted to, be something I can transfer skills, when I get out.

Right, right. All right, so you go the Recruiter, sign up, to going into the Marines. Where you end up going? Camp Pendleton? Yeah, that's where I was stationed at.

Yeah. So like San Diego, right? Yeah So we um, they have boot camp there, but we I went to the real bootcamp and now you're gonna get like a lot of comments about that But anyway, it's a joke.

Uh, yeah, then I want to Paris island That's what our boot Camp was they split the country up in half, so half the county goes there. Um, and the other half goes to paris island So I would there then i went mct your basic, you know combat training And then after that, I went to military police school.

So that's where we went from there opposite Missouri. We're up at Fort Leonard Wood. And while you're there, halfway through, they're like, who wants to do canine?

Who wants the work a dog? And I immediately was like I'm not doing that. That sounds horrible. I didn't like dogs. My dad didn' like dog growing up. My girlfriend at the time, she's not my wife, but she had like three or four dogs at home, all these animals and I hated them.

They jumped on you, they're hairy. So I'm like, I don't want to do that. But then they were like well, you have to be the top tier of your class. You got to an exceptional individual and you get air conditioning overseas.

I'll do it. So I wrote an essay first sentence I never had a dog before I don't like them you know but I like to push myself um got accepted at the program and then right after there went down to Lackland Air Force Base where they have the dog program for the DoD and we went to dog school.

So let me ask you this, you were an MP, right? And being an M. P., I've heard like different things from guys in the military, like they like them, they don't like.

I know where you're going with this and it's true. How was it? No, as soon as I was in boot camp, the drill instructor was like, are you going to be an N.

P.? And they're like kicking in your face and they call it a blue Falcon, a buddy, B. F. Don't I don't curse I know curse in general and I'll do it for the audience But you know I'm trying to say right anyway, so they because again you're and II never thought about it But your arresting your buddies like your own kind, right?

Like it's like a cop pulling over a cup on the road. I get internal affairs. Yeah Yeah, exactly. Yes. So I like all right. Well I guess, but that's why when I went to canine, like it kind of got out of that, you know, I wasn't a normal ground cop, working the road.

So are the MPs the only ones that have canines in the military or how does that work? Initially they did. Initially it was always like you have MP's was like army and Marine Corps and then like security forces is Air Force and Navy I think is master of arms.

They're different names, they're cops. And that's where you have your specialty stuff, right? You can do CID or like NCIS in the Navy, you know, all these specialty things.

And then you've canine SWAT, but they're all under the MPs. Now, as the war started to get crazy, they did develop other programs with dogs. So the infantry guys started actually like your regular grunts, They actually started going to like a dog school, But it was completely different than what we did.

They would take like hunting dogs, that were trained to go find like birds. and they were training them to find IEDs. So it was crazy.

Becoming a Military Police Canine Handler

Yeah, so they expanded the capabilities. These are the guys that were jumping out of airplanes. Oh, no, that was

different. They were like labs running around.

But you're talking about like special operations. In the Marine Corps, we have MARSOC. You have like your Navy SEALs for the Navy. But the top tier programs, like the special operations, they did get their own dogs.

And then you'll see like MPC is a multi-purpose canine. That is special dog. Like my buddy here, Grief, he was an MWD, a military working dog, and he a pet.

So an NPC is multi purpose canines. They're the ones for the Special Operations. No, mine was not. He had two purposes, one to find bombs and two to piss me off over there.

I was totally stressed. But no, the guys who are jumping out of airplanes, they're like the multi-purpose ones. They're kicking indoors. they have the capability to track, find bombs, bite, everything.

Where ours are kind of like more single. Like we had a program that went up right before I got there called Specialized search dogs and I probably lost like your entire audience all these acronyms, but it's SSDs right and But we're educating them on the national camera range, right?

So SSD was like off leash because like if you're six feet on leash and a bomb goes off, that's not good You're you have a bad day, so like we started using 30 foot leashes and But then someone's like, I have a better idea.

Let's just send them off leash. And then they were going out a hundred yards, 300 yards. Now they're on radios. Like you're talking to a dog. They're whispering them, which makes sense, right?

Operationally. You're not screaming in the middle of Afghanistan, you know? So, um, yeah. So they did SSDs, these dogs where there were labs or German shepherds, Malawas.

they're out searching and so we expanded the program and it gave us more capabilities and more reach instead of just back in the day where you had your cop you know leave the base and then go deploy overseas and get attached to like navy seals or something because that's what they used to do.

You know talk about a crazy day that would be like you're doing your normal job and they'd be all right let's go work you over there so then they just start making these programs that just train and deploy.

Wow. Wow, that's up to bed. So with your dog had that one particular task, right? And that task was looking for bombs. Yeah, and he was actually a dual purpose dog.

It was a PEDD, a patrol explosive detector dog, so he trained when you see them put the bite suit on and bite. He was trained to do that, but also to find bombs.

So he did both. Since he had both, he'd be on leash most of the time. And he's kind of a butt head. If a kid ran by him, then he would bite him. Some of them are a little bit more tame.

Then he went through a phase where he wouldn't let go. Yeah, I was like squeezing them off and oh man, it was brutal. But luckily I never got a real bite.

Thank God. What kind of dog was it? He was a German Shepherd. A German Shepard? Yes, he was the German shepherd from Germany. Wow. Yeah. So he interesting and I don't know if it's a thousand percent true, but if you ever see a dog with a black spot on their tongue, That means they're from a German bloodline.

Really? Yeah. Interesting. I'm just trying to fill your comments. Fact checkers. How big was he? Like how many pounds? He's about like 80, 90, 85 pounds.

Well, eighty-five pounds, maybe seventy something. Nothing too crazy. No, I mean, he was a big dog, but we always keep them a lot leaner. The working dogs, you've probably seen them.

Yeah, they are just a little bit lean, especially overseas. You look at some of my pictures and you see his ribs and he probably was little too skinny.

But you think about how hot it is. What would you feed him? Not those MREs, right? No, not even a poop for days. No. Like sometimes a cracker out of it or something or like a nibble of peanut butter or whatever.

But no, he would maybe had kibble for him. We had him on science diet, something. You know, we get big containers from the vet, you know. And, everybody jokes about like, what do you bring overseas?

Like how heavy was your gear? And I'm like well, I had like 80 pounds of gear and then my dog's was like 100 pounds, because you're bringing stuff for them, extra food, water.

You know, yeah. Cool, man. So so let's talk about that training, men. When you went into the Marines, became an MP, went to the canine part. What did you experience when you want in there?

Because that had to be all new. I know when I wanted to do the urban search, arrest yourself. And I had no clue what I signed up for. Right. That was a full time job of its own.

And then they were probably like sit in the ground, right? Like, did they make you do that? Go hide in a tube or something and, you know, wait? That's what they started making me do.

Yeah, yeah, exactly. Because my dog wasn't trained. Right, Right. You got to learn. There's a guy, we need people to go hide and I'm stuck inside the rebel and waiting for a dog to find me.

With the hard hat on. I was just like, God, it's hot. We're here in South Florida, so think about it. Oh yeah. For sure. So how was it like going through it?

Yeah, it was stressful for me because I love challenges and I loved pushing myself. And like I said, she's my wife now, but she loved dogs. So I was like, these are brownie points.

I've got to learn how to work a dog. It definitely had its perks from the outside looking in, But it Was hard. and i was stressed out. Like I go there and the dogs are screamed, like barking their heads off.

The kennels is loud. When you get a working dog on a leash and it's pulling you all over the place, It's stressful. I had to learn and it didn't take a long time for me to learned this like much longer.

But, um, you know, emotions run down leash, and, uh, we'll touch on that later. Cause it's important, but, Uh, I was so anxious that the dogs freaking out and just like a big cycle of craziness.

Um, it was, It was tough. I actually graduated top dog. So I think, Um I picked it up, You know? It's just, like what shooting on the range when we're shooting a lot of the kids who did bad were the ones who used to shoot at like five years old in the backyard of Kentucky, because they have bad habits.

So same thing with like dog training, like people who worked a hunting dog, they might've had bad habits. So with me coming in fresh and green, it had its perks because I got to learn everything from start.

Yeah, exactly. Who came up with the name? of the dog? Great question. The only time we develop names is at our dog program down in San Antonio. We have a breeding program.

So we'll breed dogs and then like we will either name them after pass handlers or just random names that go through a list. Grief came from Germany. He was actually a dog bought from germany because we go on buy trips all over the world.

But Grief came from Germany, so whoever named him must have just had that much grief handling him, because we have no idea. It's the worst dog name ever.

You know what I mean? We've heard some crappy ones, but that one's pretty bad. That's first one I've ever heard of a dog named Grieve. And I think it kind of really fits with the story.

Steve Jobs always said, you can only connect dots looking backwards, not forward. And, you know, when you have this name in your story, which we're gonna get into, it's kind of like, this was God's plan.

I like that. Yeah, absolutely, man. So, grief was named overseas. What was a typical day when got deployed? To begin with, was the war already happening in Afghanistan when went into the canine schooling?

Yes. So you already knew, hey, I might be going out that way. Yes, and I'm not a history buff, but I know that Afghanistan was first. You know the movie The 12 Horses or whatever?

And then we all went to Afghanistan, and then they immediately went Iraq. But then I feel like we're always in Afghanistan. I guess. Um, but it got really big.

So I know you said your brother, what years were your brothers in there again? He went, I was in high school, September 11th was what? 2001. so he had to be there in like 2003. Wow.

So yeah, he was like the first one. He was first ground troops in, so whatever that was. Yeah. 03 was bad, and then it was, like, 4 and 5. That was really bad.

And then, 6, 7, 8, it kind of coasting. I joined in 2007, um, then when I went to K-9 school, again, that transition. They're like hey, you know, I want to be a cop, but I wanna have a dog.

Then they actually had that SSD program I was telling you about. A lot of my buddies stayed back, they were in school for almost a year, because they did all these programs.

And I'm like, well, I kind of joined to be a cop. Like I kinda want to like learn, you know, have the dog jump out. Bad boys, bad boys type thing. So as soon as I get my orders to go to my base, they're like you're going to one Marine Expeditionary Force.

so not MP. You're not going be, PMO. you are not a Cop. Your going this other unit and all you doing is training and deploying. And it was the first one to get attached to that unit.

They were building this unit up to only train and deploy because it's so bad. So at that point is when it started to really ramp up. Iraq was kind of hot and then it went down a little bit.

We were supposed to send like 30 dogs to Iraq in 2009. And then we went to work. My wife was already going to go back home. You guys aren't going to Iraq or going Afghanistan.

Training, Deployment, and Life in Afghanistan

So that's when that whole shift happened. And then everything started getting bad in 09, 10 and 11 in Afghanistan, yeah. 2010, I think, was one of the worst seasons ever.

How many guys did you go out there with? We went out with 33. It was the largest number of dogs on a plane since Vietnam. We only lost one. And I said only, but that was too many.

Yeah, 100%. So I want to go into the day, like once you were deployed, what was a day in the life with you and Green? The good news is when you get there, you don't get thrown to a unit right away.

As K9 handlers, we go as our brothers, but then as soon as we get set up, We all get shipped to different units. Our jobs are to protect the lives of the ones working over there.

Whether you're attached to British Special Forces or a conventional grunt unit for the Marine Corps, You're all over

the place. Initially, you're there just setting up.

We had to set up our kennels. You get acclimated to the weather, do some training, and then they call you in one at a time like, hey, we're going here.

And then I wound up going to a sniper unit down in the southern part, very open vast deserts, little villages. A day-to-day would just be talking, walking and talking.

You know, the first like two or three chapters of my book is just like how frustrated I was just to be in the desert with my dog and, you know interviewing people, where's the bombs and searching this area and there's kids and chickens running around and.

But by yourself or you with other. I'm by myself in front, but as far as the canine guys, I. Was by. Myself because we all get split up. Right. But no, I'm with a unit.

I think there was probably at this little patrol base, it's probably like 20, 30 guys there to include Afghan army guys, like we're living with the Afghan guys.

And of course, that's stressful, right? I get there, and I was like, are these guys going to kill us in the middle of the night? You know what I mean?

Right? Yeah. Yeah, so it was interesting. I still got to like freak you out, man. It is. And it really freaked me out when they were smoking weed on patrol.

Like that was crazy. Oh, really? Oh yeah. No, it's like normal for them. We smoke cigarettes on Patrol. Well, we don't because it is like unprofessional, but like in between.

But yeah, they would just smoke weed because there was stacks of it. Do you think it And there was farms of it like we'd walk by you see cornfields like you know where I'm from I don't know if you have corn here But we're up from the Garden State.

You know, there's corn fields six feet high. That's what it was like over there. It's crazy. Yeah Yeah, I grew up in Milwaukee, Wisconsin Yeah. A lot of corn feels up that way Man, so okay, you just go out with these guys, and you're making a path to get somewhere, I would assume.

So if you are making the path, to you get to somewhere. You're the one who's kind of searching to make sure the road is clear, is that what it is? Whether it's a road, if we go into a house or a building, sometimes, like so if the house is occupied, which is where that area was, we ask all the people to come out.

And then I'd search the dog in there. We're not looking for like a bomb to get us because they're living there, it's usually like they are hiding weapons somewhere or like at cache.

So like I go search and then they put all the women and children in one room, so we're like, okay, can you get them out of the one-room? You're probably hiding everything in, you know what I mean?

Because they have to separate them. I put them in and it was always stressful. There's chickens running around, they had wild dogs everywhere and kids.

After a while you get used to it, you know, complacency sets in and you're kind of like, well, here's another day, do vehicle searches. We stop on the road and just like you see down the street here, searching cars.

So I'd searched a bunch of vehicles, 25 people jump out of a hatchback sedan and I'm like. Yeah, it's a clown car man. It's crazy. Yeah. I I couldn't believe it I swear there's 15 people in a little hatchback It happens here in south florida south i'm not even kidding.

And when i work in the fire department, man You get on scene sometimes and all of a sudden you think it was a regular car accident. That's uh, that's an mci, you know Multicasualty incident because there are so many people on one vehicle but um, so And so you're doing this day after day.

I mean, how many days, weeks, months are you in it until that one event happens? I was there for about five and a half months. So like typically, and we're really just like all the Marines we deploy for like six months, then we switch out.

You really have gotten used to this lifestyle. It's every day waking up, doing these different tasks, searching people's cars, their home. Well, I had an interesting deployment.

I with this group and I got settled, right? Because we have to sell ourselves and be like, hey, this is my limits and capabilities. This is what I can do for you guys.

And of course, they hate you. Depending on their history with dogs or like they just think like especially the guys I was with they're like oh They're too, you know too cool to let me into their clique, right?

Like So you have to sell yourself. You have think build rapport and respect with each other Once that happened and we got into a groove, I get a call, be like, hey, you have to come back to the main base.

Like we're pulling you back. And I was initially like upset. I'm like I don't want to do that. You know, it's like the worst. Comfortable. They're like you're just going to go train for a little bit and come.

So I left all my stuff there. Then when I got to an area, when we get back I found out that the one that we mentioned before, Corporal Max Donahue, he was on a mission, found two IEDs and on the third one he got killed.

Injured so bad that they got him to Germany but he lost his life three days. And we were going back for his memorial on the Big Base. And I'll never forget hearing that news from multiple people and initially it never felt real.

You go through those stages of grief almost immediately and then they hit you in different ways. They didn't get us all back because we still had a job to do, but we did a memorial there.

It was the most surreal, unbelievable experience that I've ever had because aside from losing grandparents or something growing up, it was like the first real loss that i felt as far as losing a brother, someone who's close to you.

And then just seeing, you know, uh, that really affected us and that our cattle master, our leader was there and he's like, Hey, he was like if you guys don't want to go back out, we'd have to back up.

He's, like take all the time you need. And every one of us just wanted to get back there. I'm going to work again. We just want it to continue doing what he is doing.

What was the situation with him? How, what ended up happening that? Yeah. So, um, you know, it's like some of those things, there's, I don't know the exact, exact story.

That's what I want to say, but he was, he found an ID, found one. They, they, move back to a safe distance to take care of it. And then they found another one, so sometimes what they'll do is they like put a bunch because they know.

I mean, if you get one you move it back, we're going to hit another. One. He wound up losing his life in Germany like three days later. So he was the first one in Afghanistan.

So at what point in time, obviously you had your situation with your K9. So I wanna get into that. And I know that's a very sensitive topic, but it's part of your story and you're out here spreading this word because this is gonna lead into what we talk about when it comes to mental health, right?

When we talked about PTSD and what guys like yourself, veterans like yourselves have to go through You know, I've seen it I have experienced PTSD from the fire department the 12 years being out on the road Seeing shooting stabbings all kinds of stuff, you know There there's some of these what I like to say these demons that just never leave You just have to figure out how to control it and handle it, right?

So I want to go into your story And I wants you to be as detailed as possible. So the viewers and listeners can really understand what you went through It was a normal day, just like every other day.

When trauma happens, it sneaks up on you. You're not expecting it. So it was normal. I called my wife. We had a huge mission. If we were going out there, like I said, we made the internet.

It's this big operation we did. and say, hey, can't talk for a while going out. So we went out and almost immediately we were with this big group. There was a tanker unit, Afghan army unit.

The army that I was actually with the army at the time. But there was all these people and they called on the radio, Hey, we found an ID. We were hanging out waiting and there up somewhere else.

Then I got to get a nice video of them blowing it up. Big boom, cloud of smoke. Um, cause most of the time we didn't play with them. You know what I mean?

Like we just put another bomb on it and blew it up, you know, if we knew it was there. Um. So we were moving again and we're going down to this other area.

I'm searching with grief into all these like alleys and a different, uh, close quarter areas. Cause he was a on leash dog and, ah, we get to another spot.

And we hear again, hey, we found another IED. So we're like, okay, well, yeah, and we were just hanging out, waiting. I'm sitting right here. Did Grief found that IOD?

No, these other people like it. How many IIDs did Grieve actually find? He never found an Iod once the whole time we are over there. Okay. Yeah. And as I cannot handle it, that's either a really, really good thing or a real really bad thing, right?

Because you're either 100% successful or, I mean, nobody died while I was there until now. So we're sitting there waiting and they're just gonna blow up the other one.

We're sittin' here, I'm on a wall just like I am sitting here today. Grief is right here and then right where you're kinda sitting, there's another kid and Grieff's rolling all over him.

He's petting him, telling me about his dog back home. And he's talking to me and just again, just telling how much he misses his lab or whatever it was.

Then we hear, hey, we are going to blow that control dead up. Everybody get up, and we will move back to a safe distance. So I go stand up, get all my gear and then all of a sudden like a huge boom goes off.

And then I feel just rocks and dust hitting me on the back and I turn and grief was on a retractable leash, you know, and it was all the way out and he's missing in this cloud of smoke.

Wow. So, I'm like pulling on it. You know at first I call him like he can hear me, but I just start pulling it and, he sticks scared. He's just stuck there.

And I evaluate him. I'm like, Hey buddy, you okay? Like you all right? And he was shook.

The IED Blast and Grief's Death

You know, we were too close to that thing. And a turn and look to my right and there's this giant crater in the ground, maybe 10 feet wide. There's a kid inside just wailing his arms and legs, just like screaming.

He's covered in blood. And I was just blown away by what I'm seeing, because none of it made sense. He's covered in blood, but he's screaming, which means he is breathing.

You know, he was moving his arms and legs. Like, He is fine. So I am like, okay, whatever. We have to post up security. I just moved up a little bit, got on one knee, grief is underneath me, and I'am just waiting for something to happen.

So then they call in the helicopter to get him out of there and they say, Hey, we need to search an area. And typically the dog team would be like, search a big area for, you know, the helicopters to land because you don't want them landing on an ID.

So I was like all right, I'll go search this area, but grief is gone. Like he's not paying attention. You know I'm trying to him excited and he just like his head's down, not wagging his tail.

I mean, he, just shook. So I was getting them excited and I'm frustrated. So we just walked a circle. We're in this field and i'm kicking the ground and cursing and praying and you know, just like, you get me out of here, like God help us.

And as I am doing this spiral trying to kick off an IED, I see them on top of a building lowering down the body of specialist Stephen Dupont, the kid who was sitting right next to me in grief.

And when we got up, he must have been either stepping on it or sat on top of it, but it was right next to us. And that's why that crater was there. Um, and it.

They had to get both of them out. I remember shortly after we're searching and we were making sure we have the rest of him and getting him up. One of the sergeants came up to me and said, Hey, um, why didn't grief smell that?

That's the one question a canine handler never wants to get. It's like, why didn't he find it? You can imagine the scenario of you sitting on top of an ID and my dog rolling all over you playing and he's licking his face.

I didn' have an answer for him and I never will. But then we had to continue on with the mission. We still had something to do. so such a long day we wound up getting to this big building and there's like 10 foot walls and big door in the front big, door, in, the back and the guys like hey we got to go around to the, back you know try to get in and.

The captain was there the sergeant major their medic and couple a and a guys and we get around the. Back and see this, big metal door. So the sergeant major is like, oh, I'm going to climb the wall.

I want to jump over there. So he hands me his rifle. He's got his knife like in his mouth. he climbs the Wall, jumps over. Now he's in an unsecured building by himself.

But hey, i'm just a corporal. iI'm not going tell him what to do, right? So, he is in the building. The captain, you know, we're going get into this building no matter what.

And he starts yanking on the door, peeling the mud down, and he start peeling it, pulling it down. And then the Afghans were with getting all upset. They're like blah, blah blah.

And he's like, what's the matter? He's well, you're breaking their property or something. He was like I can give two craps about their properties. We're getting this building.

So he was, we'll take a picture of it. Me being the dog guy, having a camera to take for evidence and stuff, took my camera out, take picture at the door, put it back in.

Easy act on this door like Superman bending it, he hands me his rifle and he throws the doors to the ground. I look in, there's like some jugs and stuff in there and luckily nothing happened.

Before you know it, the Sergeant Major comes around the corner. all safe and sound. He's like, Hey, got in the front. You know, so I started walking back to him and before I took my third step, everything just went white and it just felt like I was floating in air.

And it's, like if you like close your eyes and stared at the sun, it was kind of like just that glow, that hot glow and felt it, was flipping and flying and And immediately I was like I died, you know, I'm dead.

That was it. You know it happened so quick. I didn't hear anything and feel anything. And then the floating stops and then I can start to hear voices.

Hey, who's down? Who's hit? Oh shoot, K9 is down, Bretter is Then he comes up to me and I can start to like hear them getting closer and then they're moving me around a little bit.

And then I started feeling them like yank my arms and legs, you know, they starting to pull my clothes off my boots. So I'm like, well, I have legs. You know?

And, uh, started putting out, like I feel the tourniquets going on and telling the medic, my buddy, put it tighter, bro, put a tighter. He's like, you're fine, it's as tight as it goes.

And he's doing that. Um, and then the whole time they're just joking with me, or I was joking them. You know, he was like oh, You're going to be fine bro.

Like everything's going be okay. I'm like have you seen any war movie ever? Like that's the one thing they tell you before you die, right? Yeah. Yeah, your good man.

So they were right, I'll be Okay. um, so they call the nine line and they are like hey, we got one wounded and one killed. So I was like, that's weird.

I hear everybody talking. Like I don't hear anybody saying anything. So then I started realizing, I'm like well, nobody is calling for my dog. Nobody's saying go help grief or like grief come, like none of that.

It was at that moment when I knew grief was killed and he was standing right next to me. They had called it in, one wounded and one killed. helicopter comes in, boom, then it flies away because like, you know, they're waiting to get ambushed or something.

So they finally come back and, You know I feel them lift me up off the ground and put me on the helicopter and it is so loud. I couldn't hear anything.

And then everything went dark, and then woke up in the hospital in country. It was the quietest experience ever. My staff sergeant was there and the lieutenant and they met me there.

He actually came to that base for another reason. And just so happens that I got hurt the minute he showed up and then he wound up going back and getting grief They sent another helicopter just to pick up grief like he was another Marine.

So they treated Michael. Yeah. Yep. They treat them, you know, just like any other service member and yeah, so he we're in the hospital and he gets on, he's like, Hey, what you want to call your wife?

And I'm like No, like, you know, not a call that I want. Exactly. That's what I thought. And then like looking back, we can't change the past, but I should have called her because that was the first time she got a phone call from somebody other than me.

Right. You're talking about your brother and like calling home. Yeah. Can you imagine if someone else was on the other line? Like, it's a scary thing.

Your heart dropped. Yes. So, um, yeah, so I kind of messed that up, But you get on. The phone. Hey, baby. It's, uh, and then from that point on, I was just getting back to the States and getting better.

What type of injuries did that grief have you know, it's interesting Oh It's interesting you asked too, but we don't talk about it. I guess no one's told me.

No one ever sat me down being like, hey, he lost three legs and an ear. You know what I mean? They just said it was bad enough to where you don' t need to know.

So I have no idea. And I gues that saves me a lot of different things because that messes it up. Because you didn't want it to stick in your head. Yeah.

Better off not even seeing it or hearing about. Exactly. Or imagining it and then I think it's the same thing with my injuries. I think if I had my eyes, I would have probably have been way more messed up.

I mean, God willing. Because everything kind of just went white for you. It's a miracle. Yeah, it just white. If I shut my and stared at the studio lights, they were just like that.

And then it was just was white, and my were shut for about a week. Oh really? I didn't open them until, yeah, whether it were the injuries, because I have face injuries.

A little bit better now. They fixed me up pretty good. I just had a couple things and it was shut so I couldn't see any injuries. It's not like I looked down like in the war movies where they like see their legs off.

What were the injuries that you sustained? I mean, obviously we could see certain scars and stuff throughout your body. Yeah, so they had like is mostly like from the knees up.

So like anything from the knee up, I had like part of my left thigh was missing a little bit, took a chunk out of the left leg, but my right's just like burns and shrapnel wounds.

And then my arm just blew part my of left arm off and obviously my fingers, some of that. So the right arm was actually blown in half, so it was like just missing the chunk of it.

They had to take my like left and put it over here, did like this crazy Humpty Dumpty surgery. And then just fractures and stuff in your hands. Obviously, blown eardrum.

Like, you know, typical IED stuff, yeah. And that's what it was, an actual I. D.? Because I know you said you saw some like canisters or something. Yeah, like I never really got like the report or like what exactly happened.

This is insane and this is another miracle. I'm going off of pure memory because I was conscious for this whole thing. Right. And again, I don't I couldn't tell you why except for maybe being able to sit here and tell You about it.

Some guys wake up in the hospital like, you know, a day later. Yeah. I mean, i've recently, got into an accident once where I didn't remember the day, but for some reason I remembered every detail down to the second.

And so yeah, definitely, um, made it I was very blessed because this could have been way worse when I flipping through the air. Thought I lost both my legs, right?

Right. Flying that much. But No, I think most of the flipping was the head stuff, right? Like you get rock so bad. It just felt like, you know, yeah. So how long did it take you to recover from your injuries?

I mean, obviously there was a whole rehab portion that you had to go through. You weren't able to walk for a while?

Yeah, I was in the bed for, so I in Germany for about four or so days.

That was at like a Bagram hospital in Afghanistan. Then they flew me to Germany and I there for awhile because I wasn't like stable enough to move. They wanted to make sure I like good.

Cause it's like a 13 hour flight. So that started to regain my sight. I opened my eyes and then I was like blurry, but I could see a little bit. And then they got me on the plane, cut back.

Then I. Was at Walter Reed Medical Center down in Maryland. That's the wounded warrior hospital. which is crazy. I didn't even know it existed. You know what I mean?

That's like a whole military hospital. It's where the president goes, you know? Yeah. Um, but yeah, the whole floor of just wounded warriors, that whole hospital was full of them, especially during that time.

But they send you there and I was there for 33 days and initially it was like, I see you, yellow gowns and taking turns. And then I finally got up to the fifth floor, which I call like the celebrity floor.

Like that's really treat you like gold and they gave you free iPads and blankets and Celebrities come through you get to meet them and everything. So Yeah, that's pretty cool.

Well your family when all of this was happening and when you were in Germany recovering at the hospital there How was that like how was your your families?

I can only imagine they have their own stories Oh, yeah, the trauma that they went through when they got that news Oh, absolutely. Yeah, it's interesting.

So my wife is obviously my life is next to kin, right? Like, so she's going to be the one who got the car pulled up to the house with the people coming out, you know, but she got that phone call from someone else.

She immediately thought like, no, he's dead. You know what I mean? I don't want to think that. She was out to dinner that night with my family celebrating my dad's birthday at Texas Roadhouse.

They just sat down literally at the table. The satellite number comes up. She's like, hello, I can't hear you. Like hangs up, you know, calls again, call drops.

So she steps outside and picks up and he's, like how you, this is somebody else. And then that's when her, her world changed. you know she got the news and um yeah so she goes back in white as a ghost you, know sits down with my family and they immediately knew something was wrong and she's telling them and you obviously they're upset my dad's there and he he's a very logical way of looking at things a man of faith you.

Know what I mean nothing scares him like he looks for trouble type guy you He's like, did you talk to him? She's, like yeah. And he's did he speak back?

It's yeah, he was like okay, well he is fine. He has, we'll figure everything else out later, right? He got his brain, can breathe, is alive, you know.

So yeah but yeah it took a while and still dealing with that stuff today but it's tough. They were thinking about getting her to Germany because they didn't know what I was up to but they said hey just stay there, your going to be home by Friday.

I met them, they were in Jersey at the time so I meet them in Maryland shortly after. Man, that is something. But I could assure you one thing, it's made you a hell of a lot stronger as a person, going through these things.

So Alfred, I wanna go into the emotional weight of losing your canine, because that's something that, this was your partner. This was a family member.

the guy who had your six. I want to talk about that. Because there's a lot of other canine handlers, not just in the military, but a lotta first responders that do this.

A lot private security companies that work with a lots of executives that go through You know, different things with their canines become very close. I told you urban search and rescue, you know is one of them.

You got the regular police officers out on the street. They have their Canines that have multiple different tasks. So how was that emotionally? Yeah, I mean, initially it was tough.

I want to do these stages of grief, but there was also so many other things. And I think that's where people get stuck is like the distractions or the things that numb and then it doesn't hit you until like a wave later.

Like obviously I knew almost immediately when I heard that nine line call we have one killed and I did the math. I got new, but it's not like I started crying, right?

Like I didn't even care. I was like, oh, he grief died, you know, But I'm also like going through whatever they get me on a plane. And then it wasn't until about two weeks later, my wife went to the mall and she got the first generation iPad.

You know I talking like the brick. you know what I mean? So because all I could do, I was bandaged up from head to toe and all i could, do is move like one finger across the glass and she gave it to me and just so I can connect with everybody and I pulled up my Facebook and it was just a picture of me in grief and he's standing there like all like cocked up and i got my hand up we're doing that thing like hey stop i'm gonna send my dog to bite you you, know like we are training at the Camp Pendleton back home and hundreds of comments and likes and, i saw that picture and like hole in my heart and I was just like, you know, the worst sense of like emptiness and like he's gone.

You know that's when I realized he wasn't in life anymore and that made it real.

Recovery, Family Impact, and Returning Home

And I just took that like moment and then it started to spark like some dreams and nightmares and started bringing him back into my life a little bit like hey, he might be still okay.

Like, these weird thoughts, shame, guilt. Then like briefly it just started the fade because I realize like I only hurt so much because I love him. He started to teach me a lot about what grief actually means and how to process it.

You know, he taught me about life when he was alive and what we went through together. But like you said, that's why these guys, these first responders, and these other canine handlers Um, no matter what they're doing, like I'm speaking to all the dog people right now, regular dog, people, you know, they lose their dog.

I know you just, lost yours and you went through some stuff with them. You try to put them through training. Um. But all dogpeople will tell you like, Oh, I'll never forget my heart dog or like.

So tear up when I see a picture of my dog lucky or Cooper, whoever it is. And, but when you go through like hard times with a dog and your attached to them and they are in the back of your car, barking as bad guys are running by.

It's a different type of bond because you're bonded through crap. Even if you tell me about the stuff you were doing with Urban Search and Rescue, even if it's one day of training, it gets tough.

You get covered in mud, you come home, and those bonds create so much harder. That's your working dog. You're living, and it's not even just your work dog, it' like you're overseas, you are living with him.

It's you family dog and you working at the same time. Absolutely, that's why I was so envious of these guys. I got to my kennels, I get my dog he didn't listen to me, he hated me.

We just were not a good team. And I would see these veterans coming back from Iraq. They got the dust on them and their dog is right next to them. Looking at them, listening to everything they're saying.

licking their face, they're boys. And I realized like, cause they just experienced the most unbelievable thing together. You know, like you hear that bond about just veterans in general, you know they come back, their brothers, but can you imagine the effect that has on an animal that picks up on all those little things?

So that it just multiplies by a hundred, talk about 10X and something. So yeah, I mean, that's why I think it hurts a lot more for these guys because they are missing such a piece of their life that they had every day.

I couldn't imagine being like a regular street cop and then going to work the next day with nobody in the back of your car, I'd be like, no, take me off the road.

It's a very strong sense of emptiness I can only imagine. So, you know, one of the things that you brought up is that grieving process of losing your dog.

And, that griefing process, when you really start breaking it down, right, in the grieving process, you go through these different stages, initially you through the denial stage, and then you got through, the anger stage.

Then you going to the bargaining stage and from there, you start to go into the, let me see if I remember, the acceptance stage, or sorry, correction, you go in to a depression stage.

So you're going to like a depressive stage and then after you got to that depression state, your going into that acceptance state. And sometimes you can actually skip a stage or go back into a state did you through all of those stages?

Yeah, I would say so, 100%. And I'm glad you said that. I feel like a lot of good pros and clinicians will say that too, that you don't hit all the stages at once.

Because when you start outlining steps, and that's why AA can hurt people, you go through step one, step two, three, people get caught up and then they're like, why am I doing this?

It's like instructions you want to follow, right? You just put it together. So I'm glad you said that, because it's not like a step one, step two. It's just, they're just categories.

And then like someday you'll fall into one category, someday, you fall in to another. Right. and it is okay to be angry one day. You know, it it okay, to kind of be down and depressed.

Sometimes that beats people up too. Like, well, if I accept it, I let it go. Now it isn't a part of me anymore. Um, it's just it just like labels just a way to like understand it.

It's like any word, right? Just understand something and I think it is such a complex emotion and feeling that um, It is hard to and again like grief the dog taught me so much about just life Patience, you know, just when I was surviving with him just being patient every day But then like when he was killed I kind of related it back to him and like what he taught Me right like as far as It's not going to be so easy and that feeling of him missing him made everything else make sense.

You brought it up in the beginning, it's kind of weird how the dots were all connected at that point. So it was kind like I just gave a name to it, I gave it a label.

And I just, I realized that the reason it hurt so bad is because I loved him. If I was angry, it was because i loved. Right. Like if I. Accepting is cause I love him, you know, if i was starting to bargaining a little bit, um, You know it's all because.

I'm trying to break a deal. i'm. Trying to like love. Him more. Um, but that's. All because of love, so there's like, It's

always got a negative connotation to it like grief, But I think it should be looked at as a positive way.

Absolutely. So as you're going through this grieving process, what are some other invisible wounds that veterans come home with that you experience? Definitely.

You know, you hear the big ones. Everybody knows PTSD and like traumatic brain injuries and invisible wound. And like those things are such killers, in my opinion, literally, we have the suicide rates through the roof.

But I want to disclose that I personally don't think that's purely because of that, right? Like a lot of guys will get out. Not only are they labeled with PTSD DBI, I can't tell you how many times people assumed I have PTSD and TB.

So I had a TBI. Everyone gets it from getting blown up, you know what I mean? But I'm not walking around with a TB right now. I've had effects of it, but I didn't just bang my head on the way in.

get labeled with it and it kind of hinders you a little bit because then you want to carry that right like you get hey oh you got blown up you have ptsd so act that way you know because a whatever you're looking for a rating with the va or like hey you just want To get a benefit you don't mean start drilling yourself get military benefit like it has such a negative thinking and i bought into that system so much like i you Know they said hey what do you, want, to do do, you?

Want to get out or stay in And I'm like, of course I want to get out. You know what I mean? I can be a wounded warrior. Like I got a purple heart. I don't have to pay for drinks anymore.

So it's like why not? And then they had all these different labels and things and I had to play like both sides of the road. It was like you could be successful and be awesome, but then you can't like all of these other things, right?

Like you obviously don' t have PTSD if you're doing so well. That's not true. And guys who have PTSD can be very successful and vice versa. You can have a guy who's just sitting at home drinking all day and says he has PTSD, but he doesn't.

He's got other things going on, other demons. So like it was a huge thing that we have to unwrap as far as like, what is the root problem? Get down to the rude issue.

Like I struggled a lot with medication. And drinking, you know, so like initially was medication because when I left Walter Reed, they gave me a garbage bag full of medication.

You know what I mean? Because I had every issue under the sun. Treat sleep, treat anxiety, tree pain. And how was that? In your mind, I can only imagine like, wow, this is going to be the rest of my life.

I'm going be taking all of these meds. I accepted it. Yeah, I thought it was and it Was like so easy like in the beginning you asked if I could walk like I was bedridden You know things were painful.

I had to start doing PT and then I finally got to go to the bathroom They got me like a wheelchair with like the you know, it's zooming around so I can finally explore the hospital And that was awesome.

But then they're like, hey if you want to like get out of here, you gotta get this chair you know, or we're sending you a rehab. So I was like, okay, I'm getting out of this chair.

I pushed myself, right? I had something to look forward to. Had something give me purpose. Next thing you I know I am like killing myself trying to get out this wheelchair and then I took another step and another and next thing we know we are walking out a week later.

So I needed that, that push, right? But yeah, initially it was just so normal. You know, it's just like, Oh, here's your medicine. Take it. Like when I grew up and my mom gave me the like vitamins or something or like Tylenol, That's what it felt like.

Right. I had authority figure tell me to take something. Um, but yeah. When we checked out of the hospital, like they said, Here's, your stuff. Here is your thank you note.

And here is you're garbage bag full of medication. Make sure you take it, you know? And I did, and I'm like this will be the rest of my life. Wow. But it was like didn't affect me as much because like there was so much other progression, right?

Like I could get my independence back. Got to try to drive a car in a park lot for the first time. You know what I mean? So controlled, obviously. But yeah, you start to get those independence.

Back. And then, once you climb that mountain, there's just sometimes another valley below it. So like you got to watch out for that. Are you on a lot of these medications still?

I'm on nothing right now. I lied, I took Excedrin on the plane. No, no I understand. Yeah, you know I only take over the counter stuff. Um, yeah I used to my whole life like until I think it was like 2016 and and honestly like it got to the point where I was abusing it.

You know because it go to point were enough is not enough. Then I just call them like hey I am still in a lotta pain and be like well just take more. I'll never forget my therapist.

She saved my life by helping me, but she was like, you need to get help. You're in a lot of pain. So I just sent an email and they doubled it. Can you imagine how dangerous that would be for someone who wanted it?

So anyway, I was on that forever. Then obviously intervened, found out, hey, can't be doing this. I will share the details. Yeah, thank God I stopped doing that.

But then the problem was I drove by a liquor store every day. So some of these other things I was dealing with mentally, I would address the drug problem.

I know I don't need to take it, but I can live without it. But then the deep down, I'm like, i'm having a bad day. I don't have any purpose in my life.

i don' want to do this anymore. Oh, we can just drink because we're going to a bar with our social buddies, you know what I mean? So we'll just drank.

At that point, You're really sedating more of the mind than the thoughts of what you're trying to sedate that. Absolutely. Now you said therapist, so I would assume you were talking about your actual physical therapist.

Did you have an actual mental health therapist? I did. Yeah, initially, when I was home in Jersey doing our outpatient, because I would go to a rehab or go home and we got better enough to go where my wife can take care of me and go therapy.

So we did occupational and walking like going to the gym.

Grief, PTSD, and Invisible Wounds

And we just did that strictly. I wasn't seeing any mental yet. We got good enough and I went back to California to go back. So we were at, we went to back California like three months after we got out of the hospital.

And at that point is when I checked in to continue all the therapy and that's when i got set up with mental health. Okay. Yeah. I saw that, you know, they make you stare at the lights.

You know you did the EMDR and all of different things to shock your fingers or whatever and try to hypnotize all this stuff. I mean, honestly, nothing really was very good for me, I guess.

Nothing really worked. The end of the story tells you that I think faith and having a very, you know, good soul and spirit is a lot more to do it than just sitting there.

I'm not saying therapy doesn't work. It does for certain people because they need to be able to talk just the way I was wired. You know? I'd rather talk to God.

Was there someone or something that had a huge motivational effect for you to be where you're at today after your event. Wow, that was deep, yeah. Yeah, like some people have like someone else who's went through it or like a public speaker who just like, they heard him once on a YouTube video and just said, man, if he did it, I could do it.

Or something, or maybe it was your spiritual belief in your connection with God and going deeper into the Word. I'm not sure, because whatever works for you can probably be very helpful for the next time.

Yeah. No, I, so I think it was a combination of a lot of things, to be honest. Like it, was like, um, picking up different things and like really understanding, like I'm recognizing that this is happening, right?

Like I said, this one therapist in, at the hospital, she pushed me all the time and I hated it. I was in pain, you know, and that I realized I hate these therapists.

They were just torturing me, but like they pushed to a level to like be good again. And then I can look back at them being like wow, they were awesome.

You know? It was, it's like a drill instructor. It's good. Um, I had a very, very good friend of mine still, but, um, my kennel master at the time, this guy, Chris Willingham, he's the one that does the Alabama voice once in a while.

Yeah. So he, uh, He was always such a good supporter of me. He pushed me, and he goes, whatever you need, just come back to the kennels. You know, you want to train all day.

Good. If you wanna go to appointment all they good, so I added people around me that supported me loved and supported. And that was always helpful. We had a kid in the hospital, one of my roommates, and he was there for months.

Not many injuries at all, but he's there from months because he had no love and support from other people. No friends and family visited. It messes with your head.

The social connection is huge. So you would say community is very important. Yeah. And I'm not even involved in like veterans groups, you know, and I wish I was more, but it was just being involved at the right place at right time.

But picking up certain things, like you said, it is why I relate back to faith and my beliefs a lot is because people are like, Oh, I don't believe in God because like I won't hear him or whatever.

I am like he's speaking through you and other people. Like you just have to watch out and pay attention. Cause like I will sit down and somebody will come up to me and it could be having the worst day ever.

I don't get thanked for three months. The parades are gone. No metals are. And like somebody. Will give me like the most appreciative. Thank you. Then say like, the reason you're doing this, like makes me feel better or something.

To me, that's like God speaking. It's a reminder, right? Like those interventions. Like when I was getting intervention on my drugs, like when all that happened, That's God intervening.

Be like, get it together. I'm here to push you, I am your drill instructor, and I will put you this way. One instance, you brought up YouTube. Some of these bigger guys will say something on a podcast and that one sentence that they say can speak to my heart a certain way, So I guess what I can say is if somebody if you're listening to stuff you at church you got dragged to one or and if You hear that thing that tugs on your heart It's for a reason and just like

lean into that a little bit more and If you think you were having a bad day, just know that somebody else having it a lot worse So, I love that man, and that's very important and I want to actually put a bit of emphasis on that you said lean into it a little bit more.

Because what happens is, and not just with a situation like this, but I always tell people you have to be an opportunist, right? An opportunists cannot have the blinders on.

And when it comes to a lot of things and you're connected spiritually, because they say the Holy Spirit lives within you, so God is speaking to you all throughout the days, if you don't have those blinds taken off and actually recognize it and lean in to it, you won't even be able to receive the message nor the blessing that's supposed to be coming your way.

So you saying that is something important for people to understand and recognize. For the people, especially the the that don't believe in God or in a higher power, it's there.

You just have to really realize it and see it. Absolutely. Yeah, you're up. I mean taking control of your own life is the most dangerous thing you can do like it likes why they do it in a you know, You have to believe in God or not.

You got to pull even something higher than you You know yourself is feeling it's giving it up, you know That's huge and I I try to take control my life so much, like oh I gotta do this I got do that.

And then you trip. It's really just about letting go so the One of the things that I remember you saying when we talked before coming on the podcast, you talked about journaling, right?

And that journalling was something that you did. So I want to talk about the effects that journal did and why you were doing the journailing and how that actually led to you putting the book together here.

Yeah, so you brought up therapy before. I tried it all. Tried to stare at the lights, you know, we did cognitive, all the behavioral therapies. And she said, get a journal or a notebook and try to write down.

This is the most, I think, standard and most effective way that clinicians will help you get through PTSD and trauma is write-down the event in detail.

Like it could be, it can be jagged. It could just be details like, feelings, right? Just write every feeling that comes to mind when you think of this event.

So I went home and, like I said, God willing, I remembered the whole thing, so I just wrote it word for word, you know, and like six, seven pages later I came in, showed it to her, she's crying, She's bawling her eyes out, You know I'm bawlin' my eyes, out and then she was like you need to go write this and turn it into a book.

Wow. And then, uh, cause I didn't, I don't want to write a book. Like I had no idea. Right. So I'm like, okay, whatever, you know, and I thought about it for a little bit, but then I realized I did this for another reason, But I kept a journal overseas.

You know? My mom sent me a notebook, a low journal thing, And I would start to right in it. June 2nd, we just got to my new place. I am upset. like I mad that I m here, like grief is pissing me off.

He just jumped over a canal. So you're just writing everything or like, hey, my buddy Max was just killed. This is what happened. These are the feelings that I experienced.

If you read that in the journal, it's like why, why why? Why? I'm like angry at God, you know, all these different things and just pouring these emotions out into this journal in real time.

And then I just thought of them like I brought that home to share with people or just to keep for myself. So between that and the little exercise we did in therapy, she goes, go write a book and I'm like, well, I hate homework, but I'll

give it a try.

I, you know, decade later, got it together and pieced it all and from memory and different things. And yeah, wrote the book. So that kind of how it came out.

Yeah. So what was the biggest purpose on actually putting the book together? I think it evolved over time. I did the journal overseas just for stories and then in therapy it was like just do it to make yourself feel better because that's part of getting better is getting it out.

And then she goes, go write a book. And I'm thinking to myself, I don't want to do this. But then I thought about the title. I feel like I might be an artsy guy.

You don' t start a project until you got a title, like a vision. So I jumped a bunch of different stuff down and I heard, Surviving with Grief. And that's a good name.

Yeah. Like you survived the whole time with him and then surviving with the emotion after that. I'm just like, so I brought it in, showed him my stats run.

He's like that was fucking awesome, dude. Go do it, man. And so that lit a fire in me. So I think I messed around with it. It took breaks because it's very deep, dark material.

It took a long time. Of course, again, as you know, I was distracted with life and ups and downs and you need to find a job and like, Hey, what are you doing wasting all this time writing a book for like?

You know? So, and then finally I got it out. Um, but like it was so interesting and it just dawned on me when I listening to this other podcast and trying to learn, right?

all the time. That's another thing, don't ever stop learning. But I was just listening to something and they said that like journaling and all this stuff, telling the story over and over again is the fastest way to get better, right?

It's the most proven fastest to like desensitize it, to move forward, get through that exposure. And I'm like, I did all that just naturally, like it was, just happened.

Maybe that's why it helped me get such a jumpstart on being better. So my goal for the book is just to be so open about it that someone can read it and be like, wow, this kid was like a wimp.

You know what I mean? Or like wow. I feel that too. Like that's heavy on my heart. And I want to talk about that, too, you know, so that kind of like the purpose of it is hopefully that people can just start telling their story.

So, you know, right now there's an alarming number when you look at the reality of suicide rate when it comes to military and even first responders. What is something that you could kind of share based off of what you've gone through, the PTSD that your dealt with, with all of these high suicide rates?

And I know you mentioned stuff earlier, but specifically to this alarming, number of suicides rate, what is it that could share with the audience? I mean, I think the um…

You mentioned it before about the social connection and community. That is so important, right? Because we got accountability, so we have that. But just reaching out, I try to preach to people or tell them, like, hey, you got to smile to the people.

Because you don't really know. I mean, just saw a veteran. And I'm going out of my way now to say thank you to other veterans, because people do it to me all the time.

Especially the older guys, especially the Vietnam guys. And if you're a World War II guy, I mean, good on you, you are like 130 or something. So I always just go up and say, thank you.

I really appreciate what you did and just try to pass it forward because you never know what they're going through. And then just having that little connection, it will snowball.

My buddy and I, we go through our waves of depression or anxiety and we'll hang out one day and then that just snowballs. It carries on for like a week.

There's not a medicine in the world that can have that effect, you know that bond that brotherhood So you got to reach out to people if you have an itch to like reach Out to your buddy who you haven't talked to in two years.

Just do it. What you what are you gonna get? You know? Nothing's just come back a bit bad, right? So reach-out to all time Yeah, I think the the most important thing is a sense of community and you you really like dive into that because when you feel lost that's where you start to lose it yeah, man, what I'm What can you…

Right now, some of the things that you're doing, are you doing any public speaking? What are some the wins that got going on now after your whole situation?

I'd say the biggest win so far is sitting here staring at you shirtless. That's definitely the big win right now. Most distracting thing I've ever seen in my life.

You shut the door and I'm like, I have to stare at this the whole time? You know that that was um, it's it the reason why I put that there is to actually make the person sit in that seat I love it.

I absolutely love It because a lot of people sit-in that see and they're so uptight. They're nervous. Sometimes this is first podcast So I was just like, you know what?

I'll put my calendar picture One out of the three years when I did it to be there staring at them That's why we actually do the whole chicken and the bell.

It's some kind of light I Love that and it starts it off and people open up a little bit more Yeah, no, I absolutely love that. But yeah, forget that that's there.

So I did see you kind of looking there a little bit. I was like, what is he looking at? He shut the door and I thought he just put it up for me, the Marine guy.

We took the nipple tassels off. Oh, gosh. Forget it.

Journaling, the Book, and Finding Purpose

uh but yeah no it is a highlight living life and then again like i said i spent through so much stuff trying to like chase highs and wins i just telling you um offline that just got off social media for a while mostly for like lent better than teaming up chocolate um but it's just like because i got so addicted to the high right like there's the guys especially you know they get out there there is ptsd stuff and all this stuff it messes with your brain so that high, that adrenaline, because it was the only thing that was comfortable for you.

When you're overseas getting shot at, you go with your boys and that became part of you, your baseline gets messed up. So you can go home and get a motorcycle and drive 100 miles an hour.

Nothing wrong with that, except you might crash. It's just like there's nothing wrong even with what I was doing until you crash, and then it's a problem.

I'm always chasing these highs, but anyway, Just turned off social media got offline cuz I'd get like a hundred likes or something and be like, oh, I'm such a big shot Like no, what are you doing?

Like God's a Big Shot like you're sitting here talking to Sam because I allowed that to happen And again, you can believe what you want. You can pray to the trees or whatever else, but I believe in God and I belief he saved me for

a reason.

I believed he let me remember everything for reason, so I used to chase those highs. Like I would give a speech and like, oh, this is exciting, and smile weird, because they're looking at me, But now I'm just there, humble, just being like if one person walks away with this, hearing a message that maybe makes sense, that's all that matters.

And that is powerful, man. That is a rewarding thing. So Alfred, man, right now there's a big movement that's going on, specifically here in the United States when it comes to health and wellness.

It's called the Maha Movement, Make America Healthy Again, which I'm a bit part of it. I mean, Washington, D. C., every single month with R. F. K. Jr., Dr.

Oz, all those guys. And they've done some really amazing stuff, getting your chemicals and toxins out of our food system. One of the things they've done also is clean up the food system in the military.

When you look at the MREs or what they're serving them, it's just a bunch of toxic, unhealthy food to our own people that are defending our country. They've made some adjustments there where they were actually able to save money and make things healthier for the Military.

But one of things with the whole MAHA movement of what's happening, and we're talking about making America healthy again, I want to hear from you what you would want see from this movement with guys like yourselves, veterans, when it comes to mental health or guys that are dealing with the grieving process.

Oh, that's a good point. I would say there's probably systems in place and there are probably things to treat it. Wednesday night at eight o'clock, go talk about dead people or something.

They'll have grief counselors. But I don't see it's not pushed as much. And grief is not just, oh, I lost my buddy overseas or I loss my dog. It's like I lose my job, you know, lost friends, time.

That's a big one. People lose time, they grieve at that. they don' call it it because that's no normal. So maybe like something specific to grief, maybe a program or somethin'.

And it can encompass everything. Definitely a war on drugs. I think everybody knows this and I'm sure they're already up there doing that. And I know that's probably an unwinnable battle because it's about money.

It's not about anything else. But just assumptions of like, oh, you have this, take that, I don't know what the VA is a lot worse. That's already going on, but I guess instead of the war on drugs, maybe just a proactive way to catch it on the flip side, like have a program about it.

Like for instance, I battled with medication and I didn't feel welcome to talk about it because of one, the image I was trying to project, my story, and the person I am.

We were part of a top tier program. You know what I mean? It's like your biggest role model and i'm not a big rolemodel, but if somebody came out being like, oh I'm this shitty person, it's know?

There's not an acceptance for that. I'd have to go down the street and hang out with the heroin addicts. You know what I mean? Like there's plenty of those programs.

And I've sat in the meetings with family members or whatever, and it's hard enough to get them to let alone somebody like me who's carrying around all this and So maybe a lot more veteran-centered programs, like a space of community.

And don't just say, well, come here if you got problems. Come here, if want to be better. There's a difference, right? Don't come just come because you feel sick.

It's like that push, telling you, I want get out of this wheelchair. I need a push. You know, and I don t need reason for you not to keep me here. Yeah, it's all, I think that would be huge mental health wise.

Um, but yeah, and also like the transition process too, needs to be somewhat looked at as far as guys getting out because whether you saw combat or not, It's messes with you because you don't have that sense of purpose anymore.

You know, so it was like trying to figure out a way to get somebody involved. Like for me, he was handed to me on a silver platter because I was hurt.

So they're like, Oh, you're hurt, go through this system, apply for this benefit, Go do this, whatever. But then that's it. So yeah, definitely more of a transition.

I can see that, man. And I'm happy you shared that. You know, there's people out there that definitely think the same way. People in government and different organizations that are leading the way, they need to hear that Oh, yeah, like I did real estate for like a bit and like why don't we just pay if you I want to do real Estate just get your license while you're still in like they should just do like different programs for different things, right?

Like it's not that until later. You might get a brochure somewhere But make it happen like make you know, you take advantage of the any other like the GI bill or anything Yeah, that's I'm doing it now.

So yeah That's why I am on spring break. I decided to come to Fort Lauderdale. Yeah this is the spot for spring break it is i heard yeah my uber driver is like i'm not going near the beach it's raining today but the beaches like I mean they they fence up the the road so people don't get hit oh it says wild but it just it''s crazy over here yeah i try to stay out of that yeah no i can imagine yeah yeah.

My teacher's like anybody going to wear interesting for Spring Break? I'm like at Fort Lauderdale for like 12 hours so man we're gonna have a little fun here so one of my favorite podcasts is uh the battery of a CEO Stephen Bartlett's podcast, so he came out with these conversation cards.

So I'm going to have you grab that. You'll open it up. And then just take take a card out of there, actually grab two cards out there randomly. Are you going read it and then answer it?

Oh, I so I mean, ask you the question, right? You know, these are your own questions. Oh this is terrible. But can I can have one of the guys pick one?

Yeah, that's fun. Right. Yeah. Ricardo, you want to get on this? To yeah, he said to yes if these are dirty or anything, right? Like I hate cards against humanity.

No, no These are like actually written every card is written by someone like pretty prominent. Oh, that's you know, um, and they're just Some of these cards have made people cry.

Some other these cars have really made them think very closely about their life, you Know, so awesome. I love they just very unique cards. That's pretty cool I had this like lady just do that.

I went to a dog conference and this lady maybe do some tarot like weird thing like this. Similar like that, right? And it's just like, this is going to change your life.

And then I pulled it out. Honestly, I don't believe in that stuff, but it kind of tugged at my heart. It was weird. Yes, there was me. But what have you done recently for someone else?

See, like I wanted like because I want to give it like a deep, deep answer. Give it whatever answer you have. What have I done for someone else? What do you think?

I'm making it seem like I don't do anything for anybody else right now like this kid's stuck up. I guess I'll just throw in

an obvious one. I just started this new thing when I travel.

Now I bring a book with me, right? In the beginning, I'm like, Oh, can we just sell a million books? And I realized that's baloney. That's not why, you know, meant to do this.

So every time I travel, I'll bring two with me and I try to find a veteran, you know, at the airport and just thank them, sign it for them and give it to them.

Have a small conversation, share stories. And so I just saw this guy, saw him in the security line and this becomes part of the game. Like he had a suit on the Eagle Globe and anchor and like a Bronze Star ribbon, which is like he'd done some stuff.

Um, and so. I see him go through security. He vanishes. Then I find him. It's like. A game I got to go find them in. The airport. So I. See him sitting there.

excuse me sir and then sign welcome home and I just see him like tear up a little bit and i don't you know do that for that reason you i'm not trying to ruin someone's day but trying, to make it you, know iIm just like here i dont know if you read you.

Know i joke a marine wrote it there's pictures like it's not that bad you have it and just to have that conversation then the two guys next to him are like oh simplify and im like all we're all hanging out together and I don't know.

I feel like it's just nice to bring that sense of community again and just show people that we're like not alone. How many of us just sit there and stare at our phones, you know what I mean?

And now with me not addicted to my phone, I'm now messing with everybody else. So I guess that would be one. Awesome. Oh, this one's got small print. It's like a paragraph.

If you could say one thing to a family member you've lost, who would it be and what would you say and why? I don't know. Dan, that's weird, man. Thanks, Ricardo.

Man, I would. I don't know. I just have to say, I would definitely have the same with father-in-law. Um, he was a Vietnam bet. He, uh, was purple heart guy and, um, we just want to, say I'm sorry for a million different things, but also just like I wish I sat down and shared more time with him, you know, cause again, i've, got, dive was fortunate enough to meet him and he's since passed away.

Hope, Community, and Closing Advice

And he died in 2011, about a year after I was hurt. I could have picked a million different people, grandparents and stuff, but he had a big impact on my life and he told me the one reward you don't want to get is that purple heart.

I mean my wife been through so much the last you know several months to years, you Know she's been to hell and back and I've known her since she was 16 and says apologize for him for all the grief I put her through, You know putting up with me.

So Yeah Listen, he's listening. so There's a reason why that card was picked right there for you to get that word out there. He took it in so I tell you, those cards are something else.

Yeah, it's weird, man. I think they all say that. They're not tarot cards, but these cards. Man, I've had some very interesting people sitting in that seat where you're at, and those card have done some crazy things.

Done some stuff. Cue the chicken. So Alfred, as we wrap up here, I want you to give a message to the listeners, to listeners that may be dealing with actual trauma, grief, or any kind of mental struggles.

What is that last message you can leave them off with? Oh man, last messages. This is rough. You're tough, you're

tougher than I thought, man. You are good.

I just saw on Netflix, did you see that Eric Dayne thing? You know Eric Dane passed away? They have a show now, it's like Last Words. They sit him down and they record him before he dies.

It's insane. So it reminded me of that. This is intense. Yeah, so I would say that if you're dealing with stuff, this is now my thing. You asked me what I'm trying to do.

I love public speaking and I am trying get on a stage. And I've done stuff for like free and hate talking about money, but like I'd love to it as a career.

So I'll have to hopefully get more talks to make an impact. But part of my spiel that I try to perfect is to have an optimistic perspective on everything, right?

To live with hope. That's what i'm tryna tell people is live hope Because it's all about how you look at something, you know, I went through something really bad I was on the plane and I'm staring at the roof of the 13-hour flight Couldn't move.

I felt like I wasn't gonna choke to death I thought I would just gonna die and i was so mad the nurses weren't checking on me or giving me more meds or give me water all I wanted was a drink of water and the kid right next to me that I see was another bed and there's people running around and all this stuff they had to land the Plane in Italy because he almost lost his life like three times that night on The plane He's a triple amputee.

And when the nurse told me that, I swallowed all my pride and looked up and I just thank God for being alive and all the things that I had because it was a perspective thing.

I thought I'd had it worse. But I realized I was the only person who wasn't thirsty on that plane. And I just leave that with them. It's like, you got to look at the bright side.

You just haven't seen it yet. The good days are coming. If you're listening in Florida, that it just poured, but the sun's going to come out. it will you know um so just keep at it um and then my last little tidbit is get a dog because that does help and there's some science behind that right like oh yeah there are some signs behind then as a service dog trainer i believe you got to get it a little puppy or something um but yeah just to keep your head up because it does get better i promise amazing and alfred if uh people want to find you or find your book where can they find it Well, after Lent is over, they can find me on social media.

It'll be active again. Yeah. And it won't be like the day after the resurrection or, you know what I mean? It will probably be a week or something. I'll give myself a time.

But yes, I'm on Social Media or I was on like Instagram and whatever, TikTok. But my books online, it's on Amazon, so when you're getting your protein shakes or your vitamins, add that on there.

But yeah, that's all over. Amazing, brother. Listen, It was a pleasure having you on a Healthy Point of View podcast. This was powerful message and it is our opportunity here to get it out to the world.

I appreciate it so much. Thank you very much! Guys, this was a powerful message. A message that you can benefit from it. Friends, family, many people that go through the struggle.

And it doesn't just have to be a veteran or a first responder who goes through this. This is something that everybody goes to. Emotional struggle, mental struggle and it affects you physically.

Make sure you share this with your friends, your family. Whoever you think can benefits from this, make sure like, subscribe, Just remember, you gotta live life with hope.

Regardless of what you're going through, there is definitely light at the end of the tunnel. You just gotta have that

hope, so we'll see you for the next one.