Opening on grief and gratitude

The toughest pain I've ever gone through was losing Mark. And I remember my heart not just emotionally hurting, physically hurting. And I kept trying to tell people my heart hurts, tell people who are struggling in their life, whether it's grief or depression.

or whether it's, you know, financial loss, relationship loss, that I call it my GPS. And the G stands for gratitude. Every morning, in my thoughts, he's like, find one thing to be grateful for.

God, I've lost my son. How can I be grateful for anything right now? My heart was so focused on our veterans, Mark's teammates that were, you know, serving still in Iraq, experienced extreme loss, and yet they've still got to go out and battle.

How are they going to survive? My brain's mush. I can't make decisions here, but they're not life or death. And so the thought he put in my mind was, do you have hot water in your shower?

I'm like, duh, I live in America. Of course I have hot water in my shower. And he said, a lot of our troops that aren't on a base, they don't even have the ability to go take a hot shower every day.

And I'm like, oh, forgive me. Thank you, God, I have hot water. That started a habit in my life every morning when I wake up. Before my feet hit the ground, I feel one thing to be grateful for and specific in what that is.

Welcome to the TBD Fit podcast on Dr. Talks. I'm your host, Daniel Keeley, and I will be guiding you through this wellness journey in terms of optimizing health and longevity, where we unpack the science, the do's, the don'ts.

and everything in between. Come join us. Look forward to seeing you inside. Welcome back to the TBD Fit podcast where we explore the science of healing, the power of purpose, and what it truly means to live a life of impact.

I'm your host, Daniel Keeley. I'm a functional medicine practitioner who believes that well-being extends beyond the physical. It's also about connection and service and giving back, which is really underscored in our spend philosophy in order to spend your best life.

Today's conversation is one that embodies strength, sacrifice, and the power of purpose. I'm honored to be joined by Debbie Lee, the founder and CEO of America's Mighty Warriors, a nonprofit organization dedicated to honoring our troops.

veterans and gold star families. On August 2nd, 2006, and obviously I'll let Debbie share her story, she received the kind of news that no parent should ever hear.

That her son, Mark Allen Lee, a US Navy SEAL, was killed in action in Iraq. Mark was the first SEAL to give his life in that conflict and his sacrifice has become the spark that ignited Debbie's mission.

Out of unimaginable grief, she built an unstoppable movement of love, advocacy, and service, turning her pain into purpose to lift others who serve and sacrifice for our country.

Debbie, it is an absolute honor to have you on the podcast today. Thank you so much for having me. It's great to be here. So I prefer to open each episode with getting to know our guests a little bit better, and perhaps those that have passed as well, if you'd be open to speaking about that.

Tell me kind of how this all came to fruition, if you can. Yeah, you bet. It's not like I woke up one day, I was like, oh, I think I'll start a foundation.

And I did the business plan and developed it all. It just came out of very tragic circumstances. As you mentioned, my son was the first Navy SEAL that was killed in Iraq on August 2nd, 2006. And I've been a widow for 31 years.

At that point, it had been 12 years, so I'd walked through death before. And so at least I had a glimpse into what it meant to process through grief. I wrote in my journal two weeks after my husband died, what is wrong with me?

Why am I still crying? Why have things not gone back to normal? It's obviously type A personality and figured that I should have had enough time to grieve and things should be fine.

You know, I learned that it was a journey. It's a process to go through grief. And I wanted to know, so I started doing lots of reading about grieving and loss and the books that talk about the seven stages of grief.

And, you know, some of them are valid. Some of them, it's like, not everybody goes through those things. It's unique to each person. But I knew when Mark died that this would be much tougher than it was losing my husband.

And as I processed through that grief, we had tons of amazing support from when we were notified. until the funeral. Mark's buried in San Diego. He served in San Diego.

His teammates were still deployed in Iraq. But when I came back home, I wasn't near the base. I didn't have that continued support. And as a widow, I was doing this all by myself.

And I'm just like, oh my gosh, this sucks that there's nobody else there.

Introducing the podcast and Debbie Lee

to walk alongside me. And for me, what was just starting after we had buried Mark. And I'm not a person to have a pity party. And I was like, you know what?

I can't change this for me, but I can make this different for someone else. And so I think that was the first realization. And again, that still wasn't the point where I said I'm going to start a foundation.

Unfortunately, seven weeks after Mark passed, we lost another one of his teammates on Task Unit Bruiser. That was Mikey Mansoor who jumped on a grenade to save his teammates and was awarded the Medal of Honor for his heroic actions.

Mark was awarded the Silver Star for his heroic actions. But at that point, I just knew I needed to be there. I didn't know what I was going to do, but I just knew I needed to be there for that family.

That was about the same time Mark's teammates were coming back, so I wanted to be there on the tarmac when they landed, not to be the, oh my gosh, there's Mark's mom.

But to be, I had realized that was Mark's final gift to me was his teammates. And those were my boys, that's my family now, but to be able to welcome them home and say, yay, thank you, you know, job well done.

And so those two events tied together. So I went over to San Diego and we stayed in the same hotel that we'd been in for mark service. And as I went down to be there for the family, the Admiral came up to me and he said, how are you doing?

I was like, well, hanging in there. And he said, we want you to go in the vehicle with the family. And I'm like, oh, no, no, no, this is not about Mark.

This is not about me. I am here to support this family. And he looked at me almost with pleading in his eyes to say, yes, that's why we want you there.

They knew that at least I was a few weeks ahead of them in the greeting process, but to be there for them, that's

kind of what ignited it. I would happen to be in Washington, D. C.

when we had another seal come in with his face blown off, another one lost his legs. I live in Arizona. You don't just happen to be in Washington, D. C.

And God has equipped me to be able to walk into those hotel rooms and not go, oh my gosh, or to start crying, but to walk in and, you know, love on them.

But then, you know, our warriors don't need to be pampered and, you know, they don't want your sympathy either. So to give them a little loving jab and say, finally, he got no legs, I'll be able to beat you in a race when you get, you know.

And so through the process of being there and supporting families, I realized that out of the deep pain of losing Mark, I had a new passion. I had a new purpose.

And that's when we started America's Mighty Warriors to continue to support our active duty, our veterans, and other Gold Star families. And it's just grown in that process again through the most tragic thing I've ever gone through.

And we get to see 19 years later, Mark still saving his teammates' lives. He stood out on the direct line of fire three times on his final day. You saw part of that in the movie American Sniper, if you watched that, where they're on the rooftop.

And that's SEAL Team 3, Charlie Platoon. That's Mark's platoon. There were four of them that were on the rooftop that day. They took a little licensing in the Liberty to make Chris Kyle the one that stood up to save Ryan, and that was what Mark did.

I still think it's a great movie. They threw Mark under the bus the way they portrayed him, but that day it was 115, 120 degrees in Ramadi, Iraq. He had been fighting an intense firefight for two hours in those extreme temperatures.

He carried the big gun, so he carried anywhere from 150 to 180 pounds. For two hours in those extreme temperatures, I've been over to Iraq twice. I'm the first Gold Star mom in history to be in the combat zone.

I got to go to Camp Marklea that was named the base where Mark was at in his honor. I felt those extreme temperatures, but I can't even begin to imagine how you do that, combining all those things with bullets whizzing by you.

And Ryan had just been severely injured. The bullets had hit his weapon, so he had severe shrapnel injuries to the head and he dropped to the ground. Two of the seals dropped to help Ryan.

Mark could have made that very same choice, but his choice that day. stand up on the line of fire. He had the big gun. He carried the.50 cal. He knew he could probably lay down some suppressive fire.

And his hope was to get the medic up to the rooftop, which he did. He got up to the rooftop and said, we've got to get Ryan out of here immediately or there's no chance for survival.

So not just once, but then a second time, Mark made that choice again by himself to stand up, provide that cover so they could all get down off the rooftop.

He knew he probably had eyes on him where the sniper had just fired at Ryan. And he didn't weigh the pros and the cons, he just knew it was the right thing to do.

And they were all successfully were able to get down off that roof that sent Ryan off for medical attention. And they climbed in their Bradleys, then headed back to the base, which I'm proud to tell you was named Camp Mark Lee in

his memory.

Mark Leeu2019s sacrifice and the founding of Americau2019s Mighty Warriors

And Chris Kyle told me later, they're pretty sure there's no way Ryan could survive his injuries. They were waiting for that news from the hospital and getting some water to refresh themselves.

We've watched these guys do what seems like superhuman stuff to us, but they're just as real as you or I are. They were hurting just as much as you or I would have been in that circumstance.

And the chief came in and said, we just found 30 of the insurgents and without hesitation, Mark looked at his chief and he said, Roger that, let's go get them.

I've been there. I know on the other side of their base was a huge Marine base. If it would have been me and I said, go get some of the Marines that are fresh and haven't been out today and are gung-ho ready for battle.

But that's not who these guys are. And so they climbed in their Bradleys. They headed back to Ramadi. They cleared several houses, went in the last house Mark would be in, cleared the bottom of the house, and they started up the steps and they heard Mark yell, on me!

And what he was saying was, I got the lead on this. You guys follow me. And as they went up the steps, they drew fire through a window, and for the last and final time, made that choice again to stand into the line of fire.

He could have ducked below the wall, he probably would have lost half his platoon, but he made the choice. to stand up and give his life to save his teammates.

And Mark, the meaning of the name Mark, means mighty warrior. And that's where we got the name of our foundation, but it's not just mighty warrior, it's America's mighty warriors.

Because while Mark's story is the one that I tell that's personal to us, it is about all of our men and women who served and sacrificed and given so much for me.

And it's been an honor to be able to lead America's mighty warriors and continue to reach and impact the lives that are fallen. Our biggest program is our Helping Heroes Heal program.

And just like you're doing functional medicine, the medic that was with Mark when he died, Kevin Lace, got out of the SEALs and became a physician's assistant.

He works down in Pensacola, Florida with Dr. LeMay and they're well known for what they do specifically with our special forces operators and getting them that functional medicine to heal them naturally.

And I think that's a great connection that we have and what you guys are doing there as well. From pain to purpose, your story, I don't know for those who are viewing it.

I started tearing. I know that my assistant who booked this, she said this is going to be a powerful story and I already sensed that. Walk me through your breathing if you could be so kind.

I know you alluded to seven steps of breathing. Walk me through that process from like start to how you were able to come out to the other side to find purpose.

And I think my journey with Mark was a little different than most people would. Not that my Greek was any different, but because I had walked through a close loss before.

I'm a believer. And for me, I saw God walk me through losing my husband. I saw him meet my needs and take care of me in unimaginable ways that you would never think food would show up on our doorstep when absolutely

nobody knew we didn't have food.

I had that faith that I knew that's where my strength was going to come from. And that doesn't mean that you avoid it. You're like, I'm great. Life's happy.

No big deal. For me, the toughest pain I've ever gone through was losing Mark. And I remember my heart not just emotionally hurting, physically hurting.

And I kept trying to tell people, My heart hurts. And after we had that tragic shooting down in Texas at the school, one of the teacher's aides had been killed and I think she was in her face.

And her husband died, I think it was two days later. And they said there is something that actually happens to you when you go through intense grief. And I don't remember what it was called, but that actually damages your heart.

and your heart physically hurts. And I'm like, oh my gosh, that validated that I wasn't losing my mind. Grief is unlike anything else. And when I did all that research and reading, they said the toughest grief that you could go through is the instant death of your child.

And having lost a husband and lost a son, I can tell you, you know, that is so true. Now, this was my second marriage. We'd only been married eight years.

He'd been unfaithful on me. It was not a good marriage. Not that I wanted him dead, but it would be, and I don't want to compare my grief to someone who's married the love of their life for 50, 60 years.

But in the research, they do say the toughest loss is the loss of your child. And with my husband, when I went through that, I was very angry at him. He took his own life.

He committed suicide. I thought that was a very self-centered thing to do. And with Mark, I was never angry. I understood the choice that he made. I understood the sacrifice that he made so I could live free every single day that I felt that love he had for me, for his country.

for his teammates in that sacrifice that he made. One of the things early on, and I tell people who are struggling in their life, whether it's grief or depression, or whether it's, you know, financial loss, relationship loss, that I call it my GPS.

And this was some of the things that I started doing early on. And the G stands for gratitude. Every morning and again, in my thoughts, I've never audibly heard God speak, but in my thoughts, He's like, find one thing to be grateful for.

And I'm like, God, I've lost my son. How can I be grateful for anything right now? And my heart was so focused on our veterans, Mark's teammates that were, you know, serving still in Iraq, experienced extreme loss, and yet they've still got to go out and battle.

How are they going to survive? My brain's mush. I can't make decisions here, but they're not life or death. And so the thought he put in my mind was, do you have hot water in your shower?

I'm like, duh, I live in America. Of course I have hot water in my shower. And he said, a lot of our troops that aren't on a base, they don't even have the ability to go take a hot shower every day.

And I'm like, oh, forgive me. Yes. Thank you. God, I have hot water. That started to happen in my life every morning when I wake up. Before my feet hit the ground, I felt one thing to be grateful for.

and specific in what that is. And then I was also prompted to get up out of bed and quit crying and feeling sorry for myself. And tears are part of that process.

And you have more of that, you know, in the beginning of the grief. But so we've got to let those flow. That's part of that healing process, but not stay in bed all day and feel like you can't do anything.

So it was like, Okay, walk to the end of the driveway. So I got up, walk to the end of the driveway. Now, my driveway wasn't very long, literally. It was as long as my car.

So this wasn't a huge feat, but I felt like I did something. I wasn't just laying around crying. And the next day I'm competitive. So it's like, okay, walk to the end of the driveway or walk to the end of the road.

Again, there was only one house over. you know, probably three times the distance my driveway, but not a huge feat to where now I walk miles every day without fail.

I don't go to bed if I don't have my five miles. Sometimes it's six or seven miles, but it's a faithful habit of discipline that was put in my life. And as you know, there's feel-good endorphins, as I call them, that are released when you're exercising.

Now, maybe not just strolling to the end of the driveway, but when you build up that endurance and do an intense workout, that helps you feel better. So that's the G and the P.

in your GPS, and the S is the serve. Go do something for somebody else. If you're focused outward, and again, not that you're ignoring your pain and not processing through, because you've got to go smack dab through the middle of it to get to the healthier side.

But when you're serving somebody else, I don't care if it's walking your neighbor's dog or reading a book at the library to kids, you know, it doesn't have to be starting a foundation like I did, but there's something so rewarding when you're doing something for someone else.

And so those are some of those things that I learned in the grieving process and that I share with others, you know, when I'm speaking and encouraging them to do those same three things that seem so simple, but will be life-changing for you.

When you walk into our clinic, the first thing you see on the wall is attitude of gratitude. I couldn't agree more. It's absolutely foundational. Most people, they haven't identified their purpose, but you can at least live with gratitude and basic appreciation.

Before we eat dinner every night, I have this ritual. You know, some people pray, I go around and whoever's sitting at the table and list either one or even up to three things you're grateful for.

Something as simple as sitting on a chair or plumbing or obviously the food that's in front of you, but just these little kind of thoughts that ground us and give us a sense of not only gratitude, but it can help with identifying purpose.

and living your life with a little bit more passion or compassion. So I appreciate you kind of sharing your healing journey. If I can ask, because mental health issues kind of plague so many these days, and that's one of the most overlooked, I think, components of modern medicine, where we're just quick to hand out an antidepressant or an anti-anxiolytic.

Why? Do you know why? Do you have any suspicions as to why your husband committed suicide? He had a horrific problem with lying. I have never seen anybody or seen any movies to the extent of the lies that he would tell.

And of course, once I started to realize lies because he was amazing. He had to be pretty good at telling those lies or people wouldn't believe him. But once I started to realize and catch him in the lies, I'm like, oh, I felt like such an idiot.

How could I have believed this? How could I have fallen for this? But he would orchestrate other people to come

into his lies and pretend they were somebody else or You know, it was bizarre.

And I think he, rather than admit that he had such a severe problem with that, even to the point of, you know, when he took his life, his suicide letter said, you know, he had cancer.

And we had separated at that point because of the unfaithfulness and the disease as I was contracting. So we weren't living together when he took his life.

I was hoping our marriage would be restored and healed, but it was to a place of, you've got to make these decisions and commit to this in order for our marriage to go forward.

But he wrote in his suicide letter that he had cancer and the morphine wasn't helping anymore, and he didn't want to put his family through this. So he was doing the noble thing by taking his life.

And of course, Because of the extent and like I said, I don't want to go into all the details of the lies, but they were very far-fetched. But I was like, no, no, he's not going to go out this way.

I know my gut tells me my instinct that this is a lie again. And so they did an autopsy and he did not have cancer. He didn't have, you know. But like you said, those mental health issues, and I think it stemmed back to as a child, and he was an only child, that he didn't feel for whatever reason, I'm not saying his parents didn't give him that because his dad had passed.

And that was one of the big lies that he told. you know he was in vietnam that was another lie and that um when we were dating his dad had passed away and so i was gonna give him money to go back for the funeral and he's like no no i'm good well then come to find out his dad had died 20 years earlier when i first met his mom and we talked about this and then I mean, it just got to be this web of, well, he was in Vietnam, so he couldn't get back from the funeral.

He was the one actually struggling with it. That's why he lied about it. And of course, it just keeps going. Like I said, if you haven't been around somebody like that, it's bizarre.

It's crazy that I think they started to finally believe their own lies. But I think he felt like a cornered cat and that that was the only way he could solve the problem.

And I think we see that so much with suicide that And we do, you know, we deal with our veterans and our Helping Heroes Heal program. That's our biggest program.

Processing grief through GPS: gratitude, movement, and service

And we spend over a million dollars a year on medical treatments for these guys, but we've chosen to do natural things that are healing them, not, you know, the medication.

Two-thirds of the medications they're giving our veterans and our, you know, our civilians for depression, for, you know, suicide. Two-thirds of them have a side effect that says may cause suicidal tendencies.

And we wonder why our suicide rate is so high. Why? Why would we give, you know, those that are struggling, those things that, you know, that's a side effect from it?

I think a lot of it is we see in our veterans stems back to issues from childhood that were not resolved, that this is not just combat because you can see, you know, veterans that saw the very same thing on the very same teams that, you know, one responds okay and one doesn't and a lot of that and then again, I'm not a medical professional, we've just dealt with over 600 of our veterans who've gone through our program, that we see that common theme come through often that that is part of that.

So while we help them get to that place of physical healing, the frontal lobe of their brain is what the blast wave

exposure impacts the most. That controls your emotions, that controls your memory, that controls your sleep.

I'll tell you what, if I have two days of not sleeping well, you and I wouldn't be communicating because I already would have said 15 times, what were you talking about?

I'll get on the phone with American Airlines or somebody who's messed up something of mine. And I'm a very calm person, I don't get angry. And I'll get a little irritated with them and have an attitude.

And I get a phone like, who was that woman? And then I'm like, oh, I didn't sleep well last night. We respond differently and sleep is so important. But when we can get them to, you know, the comments, man, I slept eight hours last night.

When I first realized this, when we're working with our veterans, I'm like, well, when's the last time you had eight hours of normal sleep? 10 years, 15 years, I'm like, oh my gosh, no wonder they have road rage.

No wonder they can't think. No wonder they can't cope. So once we get those things restored to them and that healing take place, then they're in a much better place to deal with those emotional things.

Again, it comes back to choices that we make, what we continue to think about. There's a verse in the Bible that says, take every thought captive. And if we choose to play those negative tapes over and over and over and over in our mind, that's what we're going to start believing.

Just like I mentioned my deceased husband that I think he really started believing his own lies after he said that so many times. But to be able to provide them that hope, that healing to help processing through.

We had a seal that went to our program probably, I'm terrible with time, so maybe six years ago. And at that time I was handling everything for our Helping Heroes Heal program and I would follow up.

and say, you know, how are you doing? What symptoms are better? How's your sleep? You know, memory and like, oh my gosh, I can focus. It's like I'm playing 3D chess again, you know?

And the one that I talked to said, I have not had one suicidal ideation since I went through the program, which is huge to see that, you know, major change there.

And so he said, you saved my life. You know, I said, you were willing to give your life for me? Are you kidding? This is the least we can do for you." And he said, no, stop.

And I was like, Ruh-roh, maybe Navy Seal Math is probably not going to end well. And he said, I literally wouldn't be alive today if it wasn't for you and your foundation and the therapies you provided.

You saved my life. And when he said it that strong, I thought of Mark running into the line of fire on his final action, saving his teammates. And I was like, oh my gosh, he's still saving his teammates lives.

He's not physically here, but he is still saving his teammates lives. And that we get to see that on a daily basis. We get to hear these stories of not just life change, but life saving things that are happening.

And it is so rewarding and so amazing that I have the blessing to be able to be part of that and see those changes that are being made. You mentioned the, the sleep part.

What's interesting is when I opened up the practice, I mean, almost 10 years ago now is. 50% of people came in with sleep issues. And so it's not only relegated to veterans, unfortunately, and 50% with gut issues.

But what I've seen prevail even faster now is mental health issues, which to me is very, very scary because if you look at the US, it's estimated that one in 10 of our teens, our young students are attempting suicide.

This was a statistic that was generated two years back. Suicide is the second leading cause of death. for youth and young adults between 10 and 34 in the US currently.

So in terms of mental health, this is an epidemic that's plaguing our youth. In terms of the mental health component, talk to me about what is the process in the foundation that you've created in America's Mighty Warriors.

Talk to me when someone goes through the process, what does that look like? What is to be expected? So in the application process or in the program process?

In the program. I guess both. I guess if someone, I didn't realize if there is an application process too. Right. So for our veterans, it's not, the two quantifying things are they have to have an honorable discharge and they have to have a diagnosis of post-traumatic stress or traumatic brain injury or post-concussive syndrome that says combat related.

Then once that's there, then we send them an application. We get their records, verify that. Then our program director has an intake call with them. we do require on their part that if we're investing on average $22,000 in each one of our veterans for our year-long program, that there's some commitment on their part.

If we're spending that money, and trust me, they're worth that and so much more if we can get them healed with that. But in that process, They're required to do things.

So they have to commit to no alcohol, no tobacco, marijuana, no CBD, no illegal drugs, no abusive prescription drugs. If they're doing those things at the same time we're healing their cells, while they're destroying their cells by doing those things, they're not going to see much of an improvement.

and then they're going to be disappointed. They're going to say, oh, it doesn't work. But again, you've got to take responsibility on your own to start making those choices that are going to heal your body and keep it healthy and do those things.

We do encourage them to eat a high protein diet as well. Obviously, we don't go into their homes and see what it is that they're eating. but we want to provide them the most healing that we can get for them.

And that's why we encourage them, and these are requirements of our program to do that, because we do want them to experience the most healing. We've had some of our veterans that have said, I feel like you've restored my health back to who I was before I deployed.

And I'm like, wow, that's a home run. You know, when we're able to do that and provide that, you know, restoration of their health to them, they've sacrificed so much.

And even when they come back home, they've given up their time with their families. My son-in-law, when he deployed in the army in Iraq, when we first were over there, his third born child, his daughter was three months old.

He was gone for 15 months. He came back home, she's 18 months old. The first time she rolled over, her first step, her first word, her first birthday, all of those firsts, you know, go back and recoup that.

And that impacts the kids too, you know, when they're at that young age and there can be, you know, that separation anxiety and other issues that are going on.

But when we can provide hope and healing and accountability for them, you know, and keep them in check. And then once they see that healing and difference, they don't want to go back to the old lifestyle.

So within the course of the program, you mentioned $22,000 obviously for each veteran. And I mean, ultimately it's priceless when you're able to intervene with somebody, right?

It's difficult to quantify someone's worth, even still someone's recovery. Kudos again to the program you've been able to build. So it's a year-long program and what is it meant like?

You meet with them weekly, their learning modules or talk therapy or what goes on in lieu of kind of the duration? So our program covers minimum 40 hyperbaric oxygen therapy treatments.

We work with doctors and providers all over the United States. We do vet the clinics. They do have to be hard-sided chambers using 100% medical grade oxygen.

that have medical directors and safety protocols in place, then they're finding though in the research that 40 is just kind of that sweet spot if you have TBI.

So we've approved up to 60. We evaluate that after 40 treatments and we'll pay for an additional 20 for them. So that's two months of going getting treatment every single day.

So it's a commitment and it's hard for any of us to commit to doing something, but to see that healing that is actually taking place And I get why our veterans want to try anything and everything to get rid of the pain, whether it's self-medication or psychedelics or whatever else they're trying.

I get the desire to get rid of the pain, but let's do things that are healing you so you don't have to do those other things. We do pay for a retreat for our veteran in the program and his immediate family.

We do those down in East Texas, because this is something that impacts the whole family. We provide for the spouses a book called Love Our Vets that is written by a Vietnam veteran spouse.

And she talks about some of the issues they had in their homes that these other spouses can relate to as well. Here's things to do. Here's things not to do.

Here's things to say. Here's things not to say. And not that that's an excuse for bad behavior, for our veterans, but it lets the spouses understand a little bit better why when you send them to the grocery store to get bread, eggs, and milk, and they come home with a deer in the headlight looking like, I can't remember what you asked me to get.

And the spouse starts to feel like they're just jerking their chain and trying to piss them off. And it's not, they really can't remember. Like I said, the frontal lobe of that brain, that damage that happens there.

Suicide, mental health, and veteran healing programs

And so that helps them. We do provide emotional resolution therapy. We have a provider that works with them for that as well. Then we pay for a year of the hormone and supplement therapy with Trident Performance Medicine, which is Kevin Lace down in Pensacola, Florida.

and we take care of the, they have two doctor's visits during that year. Actually, they have three now. We've changed that program a little bit. And then they do their own blood draws.

So there's other organizations that will help with supplements, but it's like, here's your generic. You get vitamin D, you get cortisol, you get, and here's your package.

where we want to personalize it to each individual. Each person's body reacts differently. So we personalize that through the labs, you know, three times during that year as well.

And then we cover the cost of all the supplements that are shipped to them. That's remarkable. You mentioned some plant medicine, which I'm a huge proponent of.

All these are tools, obviously hyperbaric. We have a chamber in our clinic too. Tremendously powerful. And it's not, there's no one size fits all as you just so elegantly understood.

It's referencing kind of what someone needs at what time and how that intervention is going to help them best. And so that's the epitome of what I call practicing precision-based medicine.

And understanding the trauma involved, it's unique for everyone, but something like psilocybin, which I know the studies are very profound out of John Hopkins University.

I think there's a movie on Netflix. I remember the name, I think, How to Change Your Mind, but there's another one that was recently on Netflix that you've seen in terms of looking at veterans and how they've been able to overcome PTSD in lieu of taking these many journeys using psilocybin.

Again, very, very profound and helping reverse the damage, the suffering, the pain that often they go through. And as you mentioned too, it's, it's a whole family endeavor.

So I appreciate that you're, you're considering the whole picture because often enough, especially, I mean, I can't imagine what you go through having children myself.

Often enough, those that grieve sometimes the most are, are. the parents, even when children are alive because they're not the same individual. Talk to me maybe about who Mark was as a kid and maybe that's how that shaped who he became or his interest to pursue the Navy SEALs because it takes a very specific character to do that.

And obviously often the behavior of our children are reflected in the behavior of the parents in one way, whether bad or good. The stories you shared are remarkable.

So that only just stands to underscore for me, just how remarkable of a human you are in order to raise someone so powerful in terms of both mind and conviction.

Thank you. I appreciate that. But trust me, there were a lot of mistakes that I made. I wasn't going to quit. And I think that's definitely reflected in Mark's character, you know, that he learned that for me, perseverance and not quitting.

He grew up in a very traumatic home life. I married young. I was 18 when I married. My mom forbid me to marry their father. And I was strong-willed. Nobody forbids me, especially at 18, to do anything.

I'm like, watch this. And did it just to make my mom mad and show nobody's going to tell me what to do. Those consequences came back on me and my kids for those choices because he was an alcoholic and used drugs and got very violent and aggressive when he did that.

He was fine if he wasn't doing those things, but he was Dr. Jekyll, Mr. Hyde when he did and started being abused physically. And then at the end, he tried killing me and my oldest son, at three sat on the couch and watched that.

And so a lot of pain during that time. I found out because of the abuse that there was no waiting period when I filed for divorce, they granted me the divorce that day.

And so two weeks later, I found I was pregnant with Mark. So it was just like, oh my gosh, I have a three-year-old and an 18-month-old and now I'm pregnant again.

But again, I think God knew what we needed. He was such a joyful kid. He got class clown two years in a row, his junior year and senior year, and just very caring, very selfless.

If you were the underdog and being picked on in the room. You know, he'd go up and lots of times he deflated with his humor, but he would stand up for you.

And he didn't matter if the, you know, and he was a soccer player actually came home as freshman year. I homeschooled them, but he got to play with the high school and said, Hey mom, I'm going to be a professional soccer player.

And I'm like, great, Mark, but you've never played soccer. And I did teach my kids, you know, that you put your mind to it. You can do whatever you, you know, put your mind to be able to do.

And if they would come home and say, mom, I can't do that. I'm like, you mean you won't do that. You know, there's a difference there of choosing not to do something that's, you know, I won't do it when you physically have the ability to do something.

He got the most improved soccer player that freshman year. Obviously, if you've never played soccer, your skills are going to improve pretty quickly. He was the youngest soccer coach at his high school after he graduated and was in fact trying out with the Colorado Rapids, the professional soccer team in Colorado.

Blew out his knee the night before tryouts and had to come home. and get surgery, he had his ACL repaired and half his meniscus removed. And we had that half of his meniscus in our refrigerator for the longest time because he wanted to show people.

And finally I'm like, dude, throw this away. Somebody's going to come home with something to snack on. It's not going to be pretty. And the Colorado Rapids did reach out to me probably five years ago.

And I'm looking up on the wall. They presented me his team jersey and honored him because they said he would have made the team. So again, that determination and when you choose to do something, when you have that discipline then to follow through and do those things.

He would be at the high school on a Saturday just drilling and heading the ball and we got him a machine that would shoot the ball to him so he could practice by himself.

And so, those things are rewarded for your faithfulness. But I think those things, you know, he was studying to be a youth pastor before he became a Navy SEAL, so very much his faith was important to him.

He cared a lot about other people and was very selfless. Obviously, that's, you know, portrayed by his final actions of choosing to give his life to save others.

And I do know where that kid is again. I will see him, you know, when God calls me home. to see the impact that his life is probably making more so now than if he physically would have been here.

You know, and I think when you're a believer, you know, what's on the other side. You know, there's no pain, no sorrow, no sickness, you know, obviously God says he points the day we're born to the day we die.

But, you know, that's not our choice to make when we get to go to heaven, but, um, he was pretty competitive and I always tell people even beat me to heaven.

You say it with such a. just such joy that you, you know, I know you can never forget, but the ability to, to now find new purpose, existence is absolutely remarkable.

I know you've, you mentioned your, your travels, visiting combat zones, the first meeting presidents in terms of service to me, this is something that's very close to my own heart.

I've always believed that. giving back, whether it's through medicine or community outreach, supporting those who've sacrificed for our freedom, certainly like your son is really part of true healing.

How can any of those of us who feel the same calling best either support your mission or serve in ways that are meaningful to them? Like what does service look like for you?

Well, we always need people that can donate so that we can pay for them therapies. the programs that we provide for our veterans, we always need volunteers.

If you've got a talent or a skill or service that you can donate, 96% of what comes into America's Mighty Warriors goes back out the door. And we work really hard, but we've got amazing people who volunteer something that we don't have to then go pay to have that done.

We just ordered new cards and flyers that we hand out. We have a gentleman who donates all those, so we don't have to pay for those. Our website person Donates their time to be able to do that.

So if you've got a skill or a talent, you know, that's something that we can always use that. Be that person that shares our mission, whether it's encouraging people in your sphere of influence to donate to us, or letting people know in your sphere of influence how they can get help if they're a veteran or Gold Star family.

So you can always be an advocate. to continue to support us. But as I mentioned earlier, that service, when you're doing something for somebody else, you're going to benefit from that.

And that's going to be a blessing to you. You're going to feel better from being out there serving and giving. And I think of the sacrifice that our veterans do make, I mean, to the point of Mark gave his life.

And for us to sign up for recurring monthly donation and give $25 a month on a recurring donation, to be able to thank and support those who sacrificed so much.

I think that's really important to be able to do that. I think those are probably the biggest ways to serve if you want to do that with a veteran organization.

I always tell people, if you're going to serve, whether it's helping kids or pets or whatever your mission is, ask for the money. That's the form that we fill with the IRS that shows where we're spending our money.

And not that someone couldn't still cheat on there, but look at that and see where the money's being spent. You know, do a ratio between what was spent and how much went for program and admin and check it out.

Marku2019s childhood, character, and path to the SEALs

You know, be pretty amazed how many of, you know, even some huge major charities, you find out 30% is going to the cause and the rest is going to pay exorbitant salaries and fundraising expenses.

And, you know, that's not who we are. That's not what we do. We're also not one of those, you know, I've had people tell me, well, you're a nonprofit.

Nobody should get paid. Awesome. Are you willing to volunteer for the foundation? Well, sure. I could volunteer. Okay. Well, we need you to work 50 hours every week for us.

And they're like, I can't do that. You know, I have a family to support. And it's like, okay, well, I work 80, 90 hours a week. You know, I did. I've curved that back and probably working 50 now, but I'm like, so am I supposed to do that for nothing?

And trust me, I did for 10 years because I was super passionate about what we're doing. But that's part of the benefit by having volunteers that will serve.

And I think, you know, I know that you had mentioned, you know, Jaco, and that was Mark's task unit commander. And Leif was the last time Mark's been lined to fire.

When I tell that part of the story, Leif was directly behind Mark, also got shot in the shoulder, but he knows there's no way he'd be alive today if it wasn't for Mark.

They both serve on our board. They're passionate about what we do. So if you don't follow Jocko and Leif and Echelon Front, that's their leadership company.

They've written tons of books. We've got all the books on our website. That's another way people can support us is go to our website, americasmightywarriors.org and look at the merchandise we've got on there.

All the books that we sell are dedicated to Mark or tell his amazing story to the point of Jaco even has kids leadership books and it's called the Way of the Warrior Kids series.

And the little boy in the book is Mark after my Mark. It's not my story of his. There's some similarities, but he wanted to honor Mark and that's actually coming out in a movie next year as well.

But there's lots of ways that you can do that and support us and we need people's support. You have definitely inspired me. So after this, we're going to definitely take action to donate.

But above that, you mentioned individuals with skills. I have a very unique skill set to help people heal. It's kind of our mantra to help people heal faster and safer.

That's always been our goal using natural medicine. So there's a way that I can be part of your group and work within your network and help any individual that's looking through that.

I'm also glad to donate my time to do that. Awesome. Well, I will have Cowie, who's our program director for our Helping Girls Heal program, and get you our application for the clinics that we work with, and we'll take it from there.

I think the, the last question or second to last question in terms of, so we identify what kind of service means in terms of purpose, right? How you've been able to, to renew your, your purpose and find purpose.

Any advice to those, especially maybe young students, children, young adults at any age, to be honest, obviously is you have to, to find a new purpose or sense of existence.

Suggestions in terms of helping someone find purpose. Yeah, I think lots of times there's things that we've gone through personally in our life and that we struggled with and While I had no choice, the news that was given to me on August 2nd, 2006, I did have a choice how I responded.

I couldn't control the circumstances, but I had a choice how I responded. I'd curl up in a ball and feel sorry for myself. I wouldn't bring Mark back.

You know, you see what happens when people stress the impact that it physically takes on our body and destroys us when we're stressing all the time. And that's not how God wired me.

So I was able to take the pain of losing Mark and turn that into something good for so many other people and continuing to keep his legacy alive. So I think lots of times you can look at things and struggles you've had yourself and make that choice in the midst of that struggle to use that as a platform to get better yourself.

Like I said, whether it's your health, whether it's your relationships, whether it's finances, you know, whatever that struggle that you have is you have a choice how you respond and then you, you know, be disciplined and make those steps to change those things.

You can only change you, you can't change somebody else. And then as you heal in that process, use that experience then to go make a difference somewhere else.

If you're passionate about something, if your heart goes to those stray animals, you know, then take that where your drive is something that's natural, not that you've got to force it.

You know, I've always been someone who liked the war movies and the military movies. There was something naturally ingrained in me that understood sacrifice.

Obviously, we understand it at a much deeper level. You know, my son Christopher served in the Marines. Son-in-law Christopher served in the Army. Mark was Navy.

My brother was the Air Force. So we personally have that connection, but that was there before any of them served. You know, I was proud of our military and understood that, you know, they made sacrifices for me.

So find those things that you're passionate about. You know, and then it may not even be starting a foundation or serving. My background is aerospace science.

You know, I homeschooled my kids and Mark was smart, but man, he did not want to stay focused if it wasn't something he liked. And he liked aviation as well.

So then I would make all the spelling words around aviation, the history around aviation, the things that he learned, because then he was hungry for it.

He wanted to learn and do more. So if we're doing those things, whether it's in your education, in your career choices, make it things that you love and you're passionate about.

Yeah, I always suggest pursue passion. And often enough, you'll find purpose and devoid of any sort of catalyst that you've experienced. That's kind of just a simple way to find enjoyment in every moment, right?

Focus on the present, stay in the present, enjoy the present. And when you mentioned the reaction component, that to me was so powerful simply because when I was young, you'll probably appreciate this.

So I played soccer at Northwestern and then I went to go play in Europe. So that's my sport as well. A couple of my teammates played professionally as well.

So I empathize with your son's story in that regard. Injury certainly cut my career short. But I was taught at a young age, 10, 90, life is 10% action, 90% reaction.

So stress is going to happen. Life's going to hit us hard. The question is how do we bounce back? What does our resilience look like? And that's something that you have to practice.

It's a choice. We choose to wake up and make healthy choices or unhealthy. So going back to chocolate. I mean, he, to me is, is absolutely inspirational in how he approaches the discipline of his existence and the choices he made.

Every single thing is very intentional. And so that's, that's a decision. We can choose to focus on the positive or we can choose to focus on the negative, right?

It's our choice. So Debbie, your story is, it's one of courage. It's one of compassion and conviction. You definitely turned heartbreak into hope for countless lives I see.

How to support the mission and find purpose through service

So kudos to you for that. It's a reminder to all of us that we're never powerless and we can choose to serve others. And what I often say is sometimes the easiest way to help ourselves is help one person.

It's very, very gratifying. And so for those listening who want to get involved, please visit americasmightywarriors.org. We'll include that in the show notes if you want to learn how you can donate, volunteer, or at a minimum just honoring Mark's legacy such that by helping a veteran, you're helping a family in need.

Your work reminds me of why I started my practice almost 10 years ago now. It's not only to help people heal physically, but also to inspire life that gives back.

And while our focus early on was with children international, so setting up community centers, health centers for physical activity and education. just overall medicine in communities, both domestically and abroad.

That was always my philosophy to donate. I created an acronym, Spend Your Best Life. And at the top of that pyramid is D, is donated, is giving backs, healing.

It's not something we just receive. It's something that we can share. So I appreciate you for joining us today. And for the light you continue to bring to this world, it truly is a voice of Inspiration.

The last question I end every episode is, if you can have one superpower, what would it be? One superpower. I think it would be the power to heal, you know?

I think I kind of got, I don't know it's a superpower, but a God ordained, you know, to be able to have that compassion in the community. You know, it started out the week after Mark died, they called me Mama Lee.

And I was very protective of who could call me that, only Mark's brothers, you know, because I didn't get the brotherhood thing. But that has expanded to, as Jaco said on one video, first she was there for Charlie Platoon, then it was Task Unit Broser, then it was SEAL Team 3, then it was the West Coast SEALs, then it was all the SEALs, and now it's the whole military that she's there for.

And there's something unique in my ability, again, God-given ability, not anything I can dream up or make happen. to be able to relate to these veterans, to love on them, but then to give them that kick in the butt they need to say, okay, here's what you need to do, you know, and to be able to provide those therapies that are healing them.

There's something in that relationship. that makes such a huge difference for them. And I continue to hear that over and over, you know, the difference that it means just to care about somebody.

I had one of the guys the other day that sent me an email. He said, you're the first one that I really realized really does care about me. you know, and people see that care and concern.

And so I think that ability, you know, to heal people and to make a difference, whether it's physical healing, spiritual healing, mental healing, you know, we live differently when, you know, that healing takes place for us.

I appreciate your authenticity and we don't realize the power that we have innately to help heal. We don't realize how we can impact someone's life just with even a smile or a simple act of kindness.

We don't realize how we are stronger together. We are communal creatures. We thrive in a community where we are stronger together. So I appreciate what you've done, how you've turned pain into purpose.

Thank you for today's conversation. You bet. I would encourage people to, because I know I didn't mention that, but go read Mark's amazing last letter home.

It's on our website. And he talks about those very same things. He said, when's the last time you paid for a stranger's cup of coffee, meal, or tank of gas?

Those simple things. He said, we could change our world by doing more random acts of kindness. And so like you said, a smile. He said, when's the last time you opened a door for someone going in or out?

Those things make such a difference. And he ends that letter, and he says to my family and friends, do me a favor. Pass on the kindness, the love, the precious gift to human life.

Closing reflections on healing, kindness, and legacy

And what a different world that would be for all of us if we all did that every day. I'm emotional. Thank you for this today. You bet. For everyone listening, thank you for being part of this conversation.

If you too have felt inspired, please share this episode, like, subscribe, and realize that a small act of kindness can genuinely ripple farther than we can imagine.

Until next time, stay healthy, stay humble, and extend to helping him. Thank you again. Thank you. Thank you for tuning in to the TBD Fit podcast on Dr.

Talks, where we unpack all things health and longevity. If you enjoy the show, like, review and subscribe. This allows us to have a greater reach and help others on their health and wellness journey.