

## [Transcript] Honestly with Bari Weiss / Why Men Seek Danger

I'm Barry Weiss, and this is Honestly.

When most people think about war, they think about senseless killing, about brutality, violence, and horror.

My guest today says war is of course about all of those things, but it's also about something else.

It's about meaning, purpose, brotherhood, and community.

And it's why he argues that so many veterans actually miss war when they come home.

Sebastian Younger was a war correspondent for many decades.

His reporting on the front lines of Afghanistan was captured in his best-selling book, *War*, and was also made into an Academy Award-winning documentary called *Restrepo*, which followed the lives of an American platoon in one of the most dangerous outposts in Afghanistan.

Through his raw, unfiltered, on-the-ground reporting, perhaps no one has done more to illuminate the full picture, the full reality, of what war is.

And one of those realities that he has spent a lot of time trying to demystify is why human beings, particularly men, are attracted to war, why they may even need war, or at least some kind of high-risk, high-stakes, extremely dangerous undertaking.

And perhaps one of the reasons, maybe the key reason, that men are so at sea in modern life is that that kind of danger has been mostly eradicated.

At the heart of all of Younger's work, his books, *Fire*, *Tribe*, *The Perfect Storm*, which was made into a movie starring George Clooney, and his latest book, *Freedom*, which we're going to talk about in part today, are profound questions about what it really means to be human and about how danger is inextricably tied to living a meaningful life.

Stay with us.

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Sebastian Younger, welcome to Honestly.

Thank you very much.

Sebastian, I think one of the major themes that runs through all of your work, your six books, your four documentaries, is the theme of danger, you know, whether it's the physical risk that comes with doing really dangerous jobs, or the risk that comes with living in dangerous parts of the world, or most obviously the danger of war.

And I wonder if you can start by explaining what draws you to that subject.

Why have you chosen to dedicate much of your work to understanding why human beings, and I think particularly men, seek out and maybe even need danger?

I mean, personally, I think I sought those kinds of situations, situations that were dangerous, where I didn't know what the outcome would be, where the outcome may be dependent on how well I acted, how competent I was, maybe how courageous I was.

I sought those out, I think, because I grew up in a very affluent, safe American suburb, and as a human being, and as a man, and those are two different things.

I felt like I had never really sort of grown up, I'd never really tested myself, proven myself to my society, and that's a crucial, crucial threshold, a crucial step for both

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men and women, to show your group, your survival group, your peers, your society, that you're worthy, worthy of the group.

And of course, we're social primates, humans die alone in nature almost immediately.

We survive because we're part of a group, and being part of a group requires participation.

You have to be worthy of it, and you have to make sacrifices for it, or they don't want you, and that's always been true, and if you grew up in an affluent American suburb, it's very, very hard to tell if you're fulfilling those standards or not.

So I think, sort of, personally, that's what drove me.

Journalistically, situations that are in flux, that are dangerous, that are mortal, that are deadly, are situations of high consequence for the world, for history, for the future.

And so, of course, as a journalist, those drew me as well.

They were more compelling than situations where the stakes weren't very high.

I imagine that a lot of the men that grew up in your affluent suburb never sought those experiences out.

They went on to their job at McKinsey or JPMorgan or the law firm.

What made you break away from that, and what was the first dangerous thing that you sought out personally, not journalistically?

Well, my dad, you know, my dad was a refugee from three wars.

His father was Jewish.

He was born in Dresden in 1923, and they left 10 years later, the year of the Reichstag fire, I think they knew what was coming, and they went to Spain.

And they were in Spain for three years until '36 when the Fascists came in under Franco.

They fled Spain, and they went to France, and of course, we know what happened in France.

And so, that's how my father wound up in this country.

And one of the things he said to me, I mean, he had a profound gratitude for this country, both for taking him in as a refugee and for American sacrifices overseas in stopping Fascism.

And he loved this country because, as he said, Fascism will never come here.

He died early enough that he didn't see it almost come here.

My opinion almost come here in the last few years.

So, the values he instilled in me were not monetary, right?

I mean, I remember we had a friend who was a businessman who made a lot of money, and he dismissed the guy.

He was a friend.

But my father said, you know, all he does is make money.

It's really not very interesting.

Like, that's just not an interesting pursuit for one's life.

And my mother was an artist.

And so, you know, I think I oriented towards things that had sort of some inherent value, human value, rather than something like money, which really, it's hard to quite place what the value of money is beyond the needs of survival.

So, that oriented me towards waiting tables for a long time and trying to become a writer, et cetera, et cetera.

But the first dangerous thing I did, trying to just make some cash to live on, I started

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working as a climber for tree companies.

So I was on a climbing line, 50, 80, 100 feet in the air with a running chainsaw, taking trees down in pieces.

And it's very dangerous work if you make a mistake.

If you don't make a mistake, it's not dangerous.

It's less dangerous than a ladder.

And I realized that all the things that would get me killed up there were knowable.

Like, it was just the laws of physics.

And if I got killed up there, it was because I'd messed up.

And the fact that my existence was entirely my responsibility and dependent on my good actions, that that was sort of intoxicating and it allowed me to deal with my fears.

And eventually, after that, I went off to Bosnia in a desperate attempt to learn the craft of journalism and war reporting during the Bosnian Civil War and the siege of Sarajevo in 1993, which of course was long before the U.S. got there as a peacekeeping force.

That kind of danger that you felt up in the tree, that physical risk, that was a very normal part of human life everywhere in the world until something like two centuries ago.

And at least in the West, we're now living in a time of not just profound physical safety, but just utter convenience.

Like I could press a button on my phone right now and McDonald's could show up at my door 20 minutes later.

It seems sometimes to me like we live in an era in which the goal seems to be to eradicate as much danger and discomfort and suffering as possible.

Is that a virtuous goal and what are we losing in the process?

Everything that we are right now is a product of evolution.

So if we are eternally trying to reduce risk and increase convenience, that's the product of some neurological wiring and some cultural biases, I think, that have served us very, very well over the last hundreds of thousands of years.

We like things that taste sweet.

Now we can mass produce sugar so that evolutionary taste for sweet things is now something that is dangerous to us, to our health.

So the question is, how do we mitigate these things that have kept us alive for a long time because now they are almost counterproductive?

So worldwide, the greatest mortality for young women worldwide is in childbirth.

It's extremely dangerous.

For Western medicine, the mortality rate for young women giving birth was 1% per birth.

So if you gave birth to five or six children, you were running the kind of mortality risk that warriors, fighters, typically men, probably ran on the battlefield, five or six percent, something like that.

I think one of the reasons that every society in the world uses mostly men and not women for combat is because women are already running an incredibly high risk of early mortality.

The hunting of large animals that typified the Ice Age in Europe, for example, and the warfare that was clearly present in our evolutionary past for hundreds of thousands of years.

Those things were mostly done by men and were had very high risks, and the society depended on them.

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Our society depends on firemen to get us out of the building when it's on fire. There are people designated to take risks for society so that we can survive. Some of those people are women who give birth. It's one of the risks that society needs someone to step up and take or we end. There's also those roles for men, except that in a modern society, highly technological society, those roles for men are fewer and fewer. There are some dedicated services like firemen and police, etc., soldiers, whatever, a tiny percentage of the population. But the kind of general risk taking that most men had to take for most of our prehistory that has disappeared in our society and disappeared quite recently. So I think what you have are men who get a sense that they have to prove, they have to demonstrate their manhood in order to be attractive to women, in order to be acceptable to society and to their elders. But there isn't really a legal way to do it, right? There's no enemy to fight on the outskirts of Belmont, Massachusetts, where I grew up until you get a hurricane or an earthquake, the situations that require valor are sort of few and far between. So how do you, as an 18-year-old, how do you prove yourself? There's nothing to fight. There's nothing to do. Like it's all taken care of. I think that's very, very disturbing to young men, particularly who feel unworthy. It's a perfect transition to talk about your new book, Freedom. You talk about finding those situations where there's risk and valor are not really legal and not really available, but you sort of construct one for yourself in this little book. It's kind of a throwback to a time where people used to hitchhike and sleep rough and jump trains, and America today is so profoundly safe. It's so coddled, broadly speaking, that you kind of had to go out of your way to artificially create a sense of danger and living on the edge. So for the people who haven't read it, the book is a chronicle of a journey that you and a small group of acquaintances, all men, have as you walk 400 miles over several months from D.C. to my hometown of Pittsburgh along railroad lines. Why did you decide to embark on this strange pilgrimage? What were you looking to get out of it? I went on this journey long before I knew I would write a book called Freedom, but as I was writing the book, I asked myself, what's the freest you've ever been? It's a tricky question. If you work hard and make a lot of money, you have economic freedom, which is a very, very important form of freedom. If you aren't working hard and most of your hours are your own, you have temporal freedom, also very important. There's different kinds. There's emotional freedom. There's all kinds of different forms of freedom.

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What I realized is that on this trip, we were sleeping, we called it high-speed vagrancy. We were walking along the railroad lines, totally illegal, the cops were looking for us.

I mean, at one point, they were looking for us with a helicopter and they couldn't find us.

I was with two guys who were former soldiers and another guy who was a journalist who had been holding my best friend's hand as he died, as he bled out on the front lines in Misrata, Libya during the Civil War in 2011.

So I took these three guys and we walked along the railroad lines, which are these swaths, these narrow strips of no man's land that crisscrossed America.

We were sleeping under bridges and in abandoned buildings and getting our water out of creeks and cooking over fires.

We were walking through ghettos, through farms, through suburbs, through everything. America from the inside out is a totally extraordinary trip.

I realized that most nights, we were the only people who knew where we were.

We carried everything we needed on our backs.

We bought food once in a while and we were highly mobile and totally autonomous.

And no one knew where we were.

And that's a profound form of freedom.

And so I decided to write about this trip along with the historical inquiries, the scientific inquiries into why is it that humans can defeat larger adversaries?

You're the only species that can do that, the only one.

And it's what gives us freedom.

And the two are maybe uneasy companions, but they do illuminate each other quite well, I think.

There's a passage I loved in your book that I think illuminates the question of whether or not those of us living in the land of the free are actually free.

And I wondered if you could read it for me.

Our insignificance alongside so much energy even started to feel like its own form of freedom until we realized that everything we needed, food, clothes, gear, came from the very thing we thought we were outwitting.

If subsistence level survival were the standard for absolute freedom, the word would mean nothing because virtually no one could pass the test.

People love to believe they're free, though, which is hard to achieve in a society that has outsourced virtually all of the tasks needed for survival.

Few people grow their own food or build their own homes, and literally no one refines their own gasoline, performs their own surgery, makes their own ball bearings, grinds their own eyeglass lenses, or manufactures their own electronics from scratch.

Everyone, including people who vehemently oppose any form of federal government, depend on a sprawling supply chain that can only function with federal oversight.

And most of them pay roughly one-third of their income in taxes for the right to participate in this system.

For most of human history, freedom had to be at least suffered for if not died for, and that raised its value to something almost sacred.

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In modern democracies, however, an ethos of public sacrifice is rarely needed because freedom and survival are more or less guaranteed.

That is a great blessing, but allows people to believe that any sacrifice at all, rationing water during a drought, for example, are forms of government tyranny.

They are no more forms of tyranny than rationing water on a lifeboat.

The idea that we can enjoy the benefits of society while owing nothing in return is literally infantile.

Only children owe nothing.

That line that you read, the idea that for most of human history, freedom had to at least be suffered for if not died for, and that raised its value to something almost sacred.

I wonder how you think we return to that sacred version of freedom that I think not just you, but everyone is pining for and yearning for without giving up the luxuries, the comforts of modernity and peace.

And maybe there isn't a way to do that, but I wondered having taken this journey and written this book, what your thoughts on that were.

So the way humans work, the more danger we're in, the more collectively we are inspired to act.

So when a hurricane hits a town or a tornado, suddenly everyone leaps into the breach and is helping each other.

The blitz in London, the earthquake in Turkey, happens all the time.

One survivor of an earthquake in Italy in 1915 said the earthquake delivered what the law promises but cannot in fact deliver, which is the equality of all people.

In other words, after the disaster, everyone's equal.

So what you have is humans that when faced with a crisis, they band together and it feels good and people sometimes even miss those days, the blitz in London, whatever.

People miss those catastrophes enormously because it brings out their best selves, right?

But when there's no crisis, we wisely are wired to focus on our individual interests, right?

Which is great.

I mean, suddenly you've got someone who invented the bow and arrow or the iPhone or whatever.

I mean, those inventions, those incredible human feats come from individual attention, right?

Individual focus.

So we have a society where there's almost no collective threat to us.

So we almost never have to participate in a sort of group setting and it leaves us very individualistic.

So the idea of sacrifice becomes more and more bizarre.

Like you can support the illusion that you don't need anyone, which of course is complete nonsense.

You don't fill up your car with gas and you need a whole supply chain of people to do that, right?

But our need of other people is masked from us and we think we're independent.

And I mean, I happen to be a Democrat.

I grew up in a liberal environment.

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I vote Democratic.

The elitist far left is just as bad at thinking they don't owe anything to society as to sort of crazy right, right?

I mean, they deserve each other.

They're equally bad in this sort of fallacy that, oh no, I don't need anything and I can dictate my own terms, the terms of my own life outside of society's needs.

It's absurd.

One theme that also stuck out to me in the book is one that I've been thinking about a lot over the past few years.

And this is the notion that the very people who seem to have accrued the kind of money and power and standing that you think would grant them ultimate freedom are actually the least free and certainly the least courageous.

And on the flip side of that, and you write so powerfully about this in the book, various Native American tribes, right, the ultimate underdogs in a way, and particularly you write about the Apache for the unique type of freedom that they embodied, right?

They have none of the things that most people think grant us freedom, safety, physical stuff, land, and yet you make the case I think powerfully in the book that they actually in certain ways are the most free.

Can you tell me about the Apache and the type of freedom that they sort of embody?

Yeah.

So I write about them in the first section called run.

So basically the first strategy that most human societies resort to to maintain their freedom is simply being more mobile than their oppressor.

The books divide into run, fight, and think.

If you can't outrun your oppressor, you're going to have to outfight them.

If you can't outfight them, you're going to have to outthink them.

So the Apache were very mobile because they were very poor.

So their neighbors, the Pueblo societies, the Hopi, the Zuni, they're much wealthier because they lived in these sort of farming towns.

They practiced irrigation.

They lived in Pueblos that were sort of impregnable on the tops of these mesas.

And because they were so heavily rooted to the land because they lived in towns and had irrigation and fields and all these things that made them very wealthy and very safe, because of that they couldn't escape the Spaniards when they came.

The Spaniards rolled them immediately, sometimes within hours.

The Apache, on the other hand, were, in material terms, dirt poor.

They were highly nomadic.

They foraged.

They hunted.

They raided wealthier societies like the Hopi and the Zuni.

And because they were so mobile, they maintained their autonomy for another 300 years after the Spaniards showed up.

I mean, almost the last band of autonomous Apache were finally surrendered, voluntarily surrendered, and gave up their sort of wildlife in 1886.

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So they lasted a very long time.

But the demands of being an Apache in that setting were enormous.

The warriors were expected to be able to move 40 miles a day, virtually without end, and 70 miles a day upon occasion.

They might put away 300 miles on foot in three or four days.

How's that possible?

I've read that.

I don't understand how that's possible.

Well, I mean, if you're sort of trotting along at four or five miles an hour, and you do that for 18 hours, you cover a lot of territory.

And these guys, they weren't, you know, the Apache carried a bow and spear and a revolver and basically some shorts.

And that's how the warriors moved.

They lived off the land.

They had dried beef, other things that weighed very little to eat.

So they were known for being able to outrun in rough terrain, which is hard on horses.

They were known for being able to outmaneuver and outrun the cavalry.

But for all, you know, the children and the women and the old people, too, they had to be able to move.

So the children slept with food tied around their waist in a little pouch in case they had to get up and run in the middle of the night to flee an attacker.

Understand that this is a very mobile lifestyle that requires great fitness by everybody.

They weren't obese.

They didn't have diabetes, you know, et cetera.

Like they didn't have all any of the ills that our society has they couldn't afford to.

And they were poor, but their poverty actually enabled their freedom.

And I think you can see a rough equivalent of this.

Like there was one study I looked at that looked at the happiness levels of corporate lawyers making enormous amounts of money and basically lawyers doing pro bono work for good causes, making very little money and overwhelmingly the pro bono lawyers were happier.

In other words, they had more of a kind of freedom.

A moral freedom, a freedom of choice and time.

Would you call that meaning?

Yeah, I would.

So the book is about the meaning of freedom.

But the other thing I think the book is implicitly about and that I actually see throughout all of your work is about human desire, right?

You take a careful look at what humans actually yearn for.

Not what they say they want, but what they actually want.

And part of what I think you expose is that humans find profound meaning and community in crisis and in the most high stakes crisis of all, which is war.

You've covered the war in Afghanistan extensively.

I was first introduced to your work actually with your documentary Restrepo, which is about



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this U.S. Army platoon in the Corungle Valley in eastern Afghanistan.

And the film captures just how bleak war is, how exposed these soldiers were.

I think by the time America withdrew from that outpost and something like 50 soldiers had died fighting there, that is not somewhere that you expect to find community or meaning. So tell me a little bit about how that experience shaped your understanding of what it really means to be part of a community.

Yeah.

I mean, I think more and more the words is taking to mean sort of like common interest groups, you know, or something like that.

But really, when you talk about community in an ancient human sense, it's the group of people that you would die for, and who would die for you without that kind of loyalty.

I mean, think about the Apache getting chased by the cavalry up in the Sangre de Cristo Mountains or whatever, like everyone was all in, right?

And there was no surviving on your own in that circumstance.

One of the expressions out in the old West during the Apache, what were called the Apache wars was there's nothing more dangerous than a wounded Apache, because what would happen is if a guy got wounded, he would stay in place and fight to the death while allowing the rest of his group to escape.

And he had nothing to lose.

So he was fearless.

And that's community.

And I think after 9-11 in New York, there was a profound sense of community.

I think crisis does bring that a platoon in combat has that in spades.

The corn gall is an odd place for me to have the feelings that I have about it, right?

I mean, it was scorpions and spiders and people shooting at you all the time.

And it was sort of in human terms, sort of brutal place, except that for the first time in my life, I experienced what it felt like to sort of be a human being.

And by that, I mean part of a group where the stakes are so high that everyone more or less has to commit to putting the group before themselves.

And that's, for me, the ultimate meaning of being human.

I mean, we're the only species where an adult will die for a same-sex peer that they're not related to.

It does not happen in any other species.

And it is what allows us to defeat lions and tigers and bears and other humans.

Like the fact that loyalty is what allows us to defend ourselves.

Sebastian, when we talk about war, we're talking about an almost entirely masculine experience.

9 in 10 veterans or men, everyone in that valley was a man and a young man.

Why do men uniquely find value and meaning in war?

How could they not?

I mean, in a way, right?

I mean, it's the highest stakes that there are for a young man.

The stakes are life and death.

You have to put the lives of others ahead of your own life.

And you are living completely in the moment.

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All of those things are what religion aspires to impart to people and usually fails.  
War delivers.

So for a 19-year-old who has very low status in society, the profound meaning that comes from being in a life and death situation where other people are counting on you is completely life-altering.

And for hundreds of thousands of years, encountering risk either in hunting or in warfare were how young men protected their community and demonstrated their worthiness of being accepted into the group of elders, to being married, to having children.

Everything was demonstrated through courage and hardship.

And there's a phrase in English, be a man about it.

And it sounds like a sort of sexist phrase.

I think it's actually the opposite.

I think what the phrase is saying is, look, it's very possible to be an adult male and actually not a man, like not mature.

No one says be a woman about it because I think society understands that it's actually precisely because the stakes of pregnancy are so high for women that it's much harder to be an adult female and immature.

The consequences of your life for a woman can be sudden and very serious.

And men have to sort of choose to do that.

I mean, this is in historical terms, right?

And so men can fake their bravery until called upon.

And I think that's why young men want to be tested because they want their peers to know that they're worthy.

How much of the sort of screwed up dynamic, sexually, romantically, especially between young people in America, is the result of the fact that we live in a society in which there are very few opportunities for men to be brave or show their valor?

The fact that that's not required is a great blessing for everybody.

But there are a lot of things that are great blessings that have downsides.

And the downside is that I think, I mean, women have this unique role.

No other women give birth, right?

So what is it that men have?

They have this sort of strange quality where they're not very valuable, right?

I mean, in sort of genetic terms, in reproductive terms, you can kill 90% of the men in society is no problem.

Like within a generation, the population has regained its previous number.

If you kill 90% of the women in society, that's it for society.

It's over, right?

So men are sort of weirdly expendable.

And that means that if you're going to be a man that's valuable to society, you have to be prepared to give your life.

So what do you do if you're a young man and there's nothing to protect your community against?

I think it's extremely frustrating.

I think a lot of really asinine male behavior comes out of that frustration, right?

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I mean, fraternity pranks and just stupidity and all, I mean, you see it all the time, right?

Men die at six times the rate of young women in accidents and violence, right?

They jump off of stuff they shouldn't jump off of.

They climb on to stuff they shouldn't climb on to.

Whatever, they get killed all the time at six times the rate of young women.

And I think a lot of it's just this attempt to prove themselves.

But then when the shit hits the fan, that sometimes is really useful.

So in the mass shooting in Aurora, Colorado, more than 10 years ago, three or four young men were killed because they stood in front of their girlfriends.

And these are young men, they weren't in the military.

These are like 16, 17, 18 year olds.

Right.

Where does that come from?

Is that just deeply embodied in the DNA of men?

I think it's deeply embodied in the DNA of men.

And to say something that's like politically risky, but I mean, women could also be extraordinarily brave, but they're generally not brave protecting their boyfriends from gunfire.

But I'm guessing most of the women in that theater would have laid on top of a child to protect the child.

And I think that's deeply wired in women.

And so this is how the human race has survived all the dangers and adversities of the last eons.

And it's still in men and in women in these ways.

And the circumstances are very few where one can crave one's valor.

After the break, Sebastian offers a radically different explanation of what causes trauma.

I think the answer is going to surprise you.

Stay with us.

I never set out to upset anyone.

However, I was not uncomfortable with getting off my pedestal.

Arthur, JK Rowling.

And what has interested me over the last 10 years and certainly in the last few years, the last two, three years, particularly on social media, you've ruined your legacy.

Oh, you could have been beloved forever, but you chose to say this.

And I think you could not have misunderstood me more profoundly.

How do you know if what you're standing up for is right?

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Let's talk about what happens for a minute when men return for war, when men are stripped of this highly intense, risky environment that knits them to each other.

29% of veterans who fought in the war in Afghanistan have had post-traumatic stress disorder, PTSD.

But you have made the argument that when veterans and war reporters, including yourself, return from war zones, that the PTSD they experience is less a product of the trauma of war and

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more a product of the environment they're returning home to. And you've talked about how PTSD is really an existential crisis of meaning and purpose, like having left these tight-knit communities in combat where you're helping each other, only to come home to a society that is so fragmented and factioned. Tell me how you came to believe in this, what seems to be extremely plausible, but counterintuitive understanding of what plagues our veterans and our war reporters.

Yeah.

I mean, so first of all, maybe most a third of combat forces are actually engaged in combat. So the PTSD, you basically, we would be saying 100% of the people that were in any form of combat have sort of lifelong PTSD, which just is not plausible.

So something else is going on here.

I found out that Peace Corps volunteers, virtually the same percentage of Peace Corps volunteers, 25% of Peace Corps volunteers when they come home to this country sink into a dangerous depression.

So I mean, humans are wired to survive, and survival included trauma.

And if we were incapacitated by trauma for years and years and years, the human race wouldn't, one lion attacking to the village, and all of a sudden everyone's incapacitated, we would not have survived.

So we're wired to recover from trauma fairly quickly, and particularly in a group. If you take a rat and you traumatize it, and you put it in a cage by itself, it never recovers psychologically.

If you traumatize a lab mouse and put it back with the other mice, within about a week, its behavior is indistinguishable from the other mice.

And you're basically what we're doing to people is traumatizing them in war, and then bringing them back and putting them in cages by themselves.

I mean, that's basically what our society is compared to other societies, which small scale tribal societies are extremely group oriented, and we're not.

The other thing that I would say, when we came back from Restrepo, a lot of the guys in the platoon, if not virtually all of them, were like, we want to go back to Restrepo.

We don't want to go back to America, they're based in Italy, so they were sort of transitioning through Italy.

They want to go back to Restrepo.

And I thought that that was awfully bizarre, except that I sort of had some of those same feelings.

And then I remembered a surrogate uncle of mine named Ellis, and he was part Lakota, part Apache.

He was born in 1924, and this was his language, not mine, right?

The way he put it was, all throughout the history of the American frontier, white people were always running off to join the Indians.

He said, we Indians never ran off to join the white people.

And so all of a sudden, I remember what Ellis said in the context of the soldiers.

I was like, oh, of course they want to be back there, that's because they'll be with each other.

They'll be in the tribe, and we all want to be part of a tribe.

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And what they're looking at in coming home is a lot of good things, their girlfriend, their other things they loved about their life before they went to war, but they don't have a tribe, and it's a fundamental human desire to be closely connected to a group of people.

And to me, that sort of answered the question of like, why is it that soldiers who weren't even in combat, why are those people getting PTSD?

Of course, it's not PTSD, they weren't traumatized.

But what they are experiencing is a profound lack of connection to their home society, the society that they're part of.

And along the real connection that they had, I mean, they might have been a support unit or a rear base, but it doesn't matter.

You're functioning in a group of 30 or 40 people, that is the size of a typical human survival group in our evolutionary past, and of course they miss it.

And that's when the sort of light bulb went on about what's actually going on with our veterans.

You've written about your own experience coming home from reporting in Afghanistan, and in particular this moment on the subway in New York that changed how you understand trauma.

Could you tell us that story?

Yeah.

So trauma is a real thing.

It has real consequences, and I hope no one thinks I'm saying otherwise.

So I was in Afghanistan in 1996 when the Taliban came in, and my next trip back there was in 2000, I was with Ahmad Shah Massoud, who was the leader of the Northern Alliance, and he was fighting the Taliban in al-Qaeda in the north in Badakshan.

He was outnumbered three to one, but he was a brilliant strategist and tactician, and so he was doing quite well against these forces.

And I was spent two months with him, and the Taliban had all the toys, right?

They had the artillery, they had the air force, they had the tanks.

They were the empire in that fight, and Massoud, his fighters were the sort of guerrilla fighters.

And so, you know, we were in a situation where we were shelled really, really badly with Kutusha rockets, and we lost our horse because the horse couldn't take cover, and we could, and the shrapnel killed our horse.

We were in another situation where some guys had attacked through a minefield, they're sort of like a sort of wave assault up a hill, you know, in the Taliban trenches, and they went through a minefield, and it tore up a bunch of guys.

And so I was right there when they brought them, they dragged them back.

And absolutely horrifying, horrifying things.

I got back to New York, and one day I tried to take the subway, and I panicked in the subway.

Everything was amplified, it was too loud, it was too bright, there was too many people, the trains were moving too fast, like everything was going to kill me.

And I knew, you know, actually I knew it wasn't, right, but it felt like everything was going to kill me.

And I put my back against the steel pillar, and just stayed there, you know, like protecting

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myself, and when I couldn't take it anymore, I ran up the stairs and out on the street, and you know, walked wherever I was going.

And I didn't connect it to, I had a freak out in a ski gondola, another time I was in a cafe in Paris after I'd covered the war, civil war in Liberia, and I saw two men carrying a mattress across the street, and I saw, I saw a body.

I knew it was a mattress, but I reacted as if it was a dead body, and I mean, I was on the ground in Paris, right, I mean, a full blown panic attack.

And it never occurred to me that this had anything to do with combat, because there aren't subways in Afghanistan, right, there were no ski gondolas, like I never connected it to combat until I was talking to a friend of mine who happens to be a psychologist, and she asked about, like, the consequences of covering combat, and I was like, ah, nah, not really, a little jumpy for a while, but I'm good, and then I said, but, you know, I do once in a while have massive panic attacks, but I don't think that has anything to do with combat, and she just laughed, she was like, you may want to go talk to somebody. That is exactly what it was, and eventually, I didn't talk to anybody, and eventually went away.

Most Americans don't walk around and mistake a mattress for a body, but many Americans are depressed and anxious, there's insane numbers of Americans that are on SSRIs.

You draw a connection between our lack of experience with deep community risk and danger, is the reason that we're so depressed and anxious because we don't have those fundamental things that make us human?

Disasters and wars are deeply traumatizing and come with huge human costs.

The upside is that it draws people together, and in a modern society, that experience of togetherness can feel like a drug, a really good drug, like, oh, finally, I feel good.

I covered the Civil War in Bosnia in the early 90s, and I interviewed a woman who was badly wounded during the war when she was a teenager, she almost lost her leg, they operated on her without anesthesia to save her leg, unimaginable suffering, and she said to me, we all miss the war, the civilians miss the war, because we were all together then, and there's graffiti outside Sarajevo that says things were better when they were bad.

So even war survivors, civilian war survivors, understand that the sense of community is so powerful that you're even willing to risk your life to have it again.

So war, what is it good for?

A lot, actually, in your view.

Oh, yeah.

It sort of enables the highest human values, along with some of the basest human values, right?

But you get both, right?

And courage and people sacrificing their safety and even their lives to help other people.

I mean, all these incredibly noble human behaviors come to the forefront in war.

I mean, look at the Ukrainians right now.

My God, what an inspiring people.

Men, women, children, everybody, I mean, they're in it, you know, and it's very, very moving.

But back to this country, I mean, the statistics show that as affluence goes up in a society, the suicide rate, the depression rate, addiction rate, all these things tend to go up.

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In other words, our great affluence, which has, again, an enormous blessing, right? It comes with many, many great, beautiful things. It does have the downside that we have some of the highest levels of sort of like mental illness of any society. It's sort of extraordinary. I can't remember the numbers exactly. But as you said, enormous percentage of Americans on antidepressants, that's nuts, right? And it's partly the medical industry monetizing mental illness and selling billions and billions of dollars worth of medication to us. You know, it's partly that, right? But it's partly a function of how alienated our society is. And I don't know what to do with it. I would say my advice, start by dumping your smartphone. Do you have a smartphone? God, no. Do you have any phone at all? I have a flip phone. Like a burner. Would people say it? Call a burner phone. Amazing, amazing. Okay. Given that you just brought up the Ukrainians and the heroism of the Ukrainian people, Sebastian, we're speaking today very close to the anniversary of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. And a year ago, it seemed like the consensus, even among those experts, very sympathetic with Ukraine's cause, was, of course, Russia's going to prevail. Of course, Putin's going to win. They're nuclear power. They're stronger military. They have more resources. They're run by a strong man who doesn't care about life. But that isn't what happened. You have studied war and covered it for many decades. Why did everyone get that wrong? Well, I think they had the same confidence when we went into Afghanistan, and we did what the Russians could not do in Ukraine. We completely took over that country almost instantly. But the problem is trying to hold territory against a hostile population that's willing to die fighting you. And that's extremely hard. So 20 years later, we pulled out. We sort of agreed to a very unfavorable peace deal and pulled out and conceded Afghanistan to a military force that had no air force, had no artillery, and a lot of them didn't

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even have boots, and we lost to them, right?

We didn't lose, but we decided that we couldn't fight any longer, which is sort of the same thing.

And so, I mean, there were some people saying, this isn't going to be so easy for the Russians. And I was one of them.

I expected they were going to take the country pretty quickly, and then the uprising would start.

And then the sort of nighttime operations, the assassinations, this sort of guerrilla warfare would start, which it would have been very hard for Russia to hold Ukraine, had it taken it.

What I didn't see coming was the fact that they weren't even going to come close to taking it.

So what I looked at in my book, Freedom, I think I said before, only in humans can the smaller individual or the smaller group prevail against a larger one.

And history is littered with examples.

The Montenegrins defeated the Ottoman Empire, and they were outnumbered 12 to 1, the Taliban with the U.S.

I looked at mixed martial arts in the early days, about 20 years ago, the early days of the UFC, they had many fights where there was like a hundred-pound mismatch between different fighters.

And as often as not, the smaller guy would win.

So what makes a successful underdog?

Well, first of all, they're not burdened by the disadvantages of great strength and power.

So if you're the larger fighter, be it an army or an individual, moving around burns a huge amount of energy, and literally in the human body burns more oxygen.

And if you're smaller, you're more reactive, you're more mobile, and you burn less energy.

And that's true in the ring and on the battlefield.

So the smaller contestant, the smaller military has the advantages of adaptability and agility.

But they're also, if you're fighting, like if you're fighting for your freedom, if you're fighting for the lives of your families, for your entire, if you're fighting for your culture, you have nothing to lose.

And that kind of motivation is enormously powerful in the battlefield.

The Russian soldiers, like a stranger comes to your door to kill your family, you're going to fight them till you're dead.

I think any adult would do that for their children, male or female, right?

That's the situation the Ukrainians are in.

And it's very, very costly to win a war with people who are faced with that circumstance.

And throughout history, smaller groups have won these fights.

And I think now that the Ukrainians have had some success, now the morale is on their side at this point.

And that has a huge effect on the battlefield.

A staggering percentage of veterans since the Iraq war have become very outspoken critics of American interventionism.

64% say the Iraq war wasn't worth fighting.



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And among just anecdotally, a lot of young people I know have turned deeply against or deeply isolationist.

And that's no longer a left-wing thing, right?

There's a growing wing of the Republican Party now advocating against American interventionism. And a lot of this has focused on American support for the effort in Ukraine.

Some of them are arguing that we're essentially betraying Americans by sending arms and aid there.

How do you understand this perspective?

And what do you say to that argument, which I imagine is being made by some people who are your friends?

Well, I think there's a very, very big difference politically, morally, legally between supplying a country with arms to defend itself against an aggressor and sending our own troops to fight in a foreign land.

It's sort of apples and oranges.

So the anti-interventionist wing of both parties, I think, are not really making that distinction. Also, I would say about the right wing, I mean, during the Spanish Civil War, American conservatives were so worried about communism that they supported the fascists.

They supported Franco.

And actually, the people that went to volunteer to fight for democracy in Spain were investigated by the FBI, were viewed with great suspicion.

And so I feel like there's a little bit of that going on right now.

I think if it weren't Putin, I mean, of course, the Russians and Putin were all entangled with the Trump administration in many, many different unsavory ways.

So if you're a Republican, Putin might be seen as an ally of your deposed president.

To make that case stronger, I think the way that a lot of people on the right see Putin, I'd argue wrongly, is like, he's masculine.

He's at least a man.

He's not like a weak American effeminate, et cetera, et cetera, et cetera.

That is a huge part of the kind of socio-cultural appeal, I think.

Because when I've tried to sort of rack my brain and understand how is it that someone who could be otherwise thoughtful and smart, how could they possibly be defending Russia?

And a lot of it seems to be the sort of avatar that Russia's playing in their mind vis-a-vis America.

It's like America is the fallen empire, America's crumbling, America doesn't believe in itself.

At least Putin will kill to get what he wants is sort of how the argument goes.

Yeah, I think there's a bit of cultural affiliation there, too.

I mean, let's be clear about masculinity, right?

The idea that Putin's masculine is laughable.

I mean, riding a horse shirtless doesn't make you masculine.

If he wanted to grab an AK and lead, I mean, I watched Masoud scout out an attack route through a minefield under sniper fire because he was worried that if his troops took the wrong route, more of them would get killed and they almost killed him.

This was the supreme commander of the Northern Alliance doing this with two trusted aides.

They crawled forward through No Man's Land to try to figure out a route that was not

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through the minefields.

That's manhood.

That's bravery.

Putin would never do that.

And I would say about Zelensky, I mean, you can imagine what would have happened to Zelensky if the Russians had taken Kiev, right?

I mean, the Russians are executing their own soldiers for cowardice.

Imagine what they would have done to Zelensky.

And when the CIA offered to get him out of there, he declined.

He said, no, my place is here with my people and I'll die here if I have to.

And one of the, you asked about the sort of like what qualities are common to successful underdog groups, you know, one is a sort of transcendent cause, like I'm fighting for the freedom of my country and the safety of my family.

Another one, a very important one is leadership is willing to die.

If your leaders are not willing to suffer the same consequences as everyone else, your cause is going to fail.

So you know, I would say if we see Putin out there on the front lines, I mean, it's laughable, but if he were out there on the front lines with some bullets going past his head, they're like, all right, well done, Putin.

You showed us something there, but that's not the man he is.

He's a bully and he's a coward.

A lot of Americans feel betrayed by four successive American administrations that failed to win the war in Afghanistan, a war that you've said, quote, would have benefited the entire world.

How do you think, A, the American government can repair public trust when it comes to our foreign adventures?

And do you still think that we are the leader of the free world?

You saved the easy questions for last, wow.

How do we restore faith in government?

So there's an amazing book called They Knew by a woman named Sarah Kensior.

And basically it's about conspiracy and conspiracy theory in this country.

And what she maintains, I think she's right, is that left and right political parties don't really matter that much in this country.

The government is basically run by what she sort of describes as a kind of elite cartel.

Both on the left and on the right, enormous amounts of money are being made by politicians who go on to become lobbyists and corporations fund their campaigns and blah, blah, blah.

And there's virtually no accountability and there's a huge amount of monkey business going on and almost no transparency.

And that's just as true of my Democrats as of the Republicans, right?

On both sides.

And one must read her book.

It's extraordinary.

What I would say is that there would be some, the government could reclaim the trust of the Americans by being obsessively transparent, right?

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But if you do that, the whole house of cards falls.

I mean, after 2008, dozen or so men who constructed our economic collapse, they all took enormous multi-million dollar bonuses, 40, 50 million, 100 million dollar bonuses while the companies they bankrupted were being bailed out by the United States.

And none of those people were prosecuted, not one.

And some went on serving government, right?

So why would you trust the government?

And I mean both the Democrats and the Republicans.

It's revolting.

You know, I would say that, you know, the government would have to do something it's never going to do, which is to make itself vulnerable to scrutiny.

Sebastian, a lot of your work has been observing and reporting the wars that take place beyond our borders.

I wondered what you make of what is transpiring here at home, right?

Political tribalism is something we talk about a tremendous amount on the show and in the free press in general.

A lot of Americans, I think, feel often like they're living in a different reality than Americans who vote differently than them.

You know, is this just a normal part of American life or a huge country, a lot of different viewpoints, or is it a byproduct of something that's gone really wrong?

I think the political leadership has completely failed us.

I mean, I think they have weaponized the politics of partisan division, both sides have, particularly the Republicans, but both sides, and that has trickled down the way, you know, children start fighting when their parents are fighting, right?

I mean, it's like that's what the populace is doing when they see their political leaders acting in totally unconscionable ways.

And I mean, I'm, you know, I vote Democratic, but I'm sorry, the sort of Hillary's basket of deplorables comment, how unfortunate, how elitist, how stupid, you know, to characterize Americans in those, in moral terms, right?

And likewise, Donald Trump saying that the president and commander-in-chief is an imposter because he's not even a U.S. citizen and no one in the Republican Party rejected that idea.

And keep in mind, we're in the middle of two wars.

As a soldier, what would you think if, like a presidential candidate was telling you that your commander-in-chief was actually an imposter?

Like, how is that not treason, right?

And so, I mean, I think you can make an argument that treating the opposite political party, not just as an adversary, but actually as an enemy of the state that's trying to undermine the safety, the welfare of this country, I think you can argue that kind of language is a national security threat because no other country is going to defeat this country militarily and probably not economically, right?

We're just too big.

But we can defeat ourselves.

If this country goes down, we will have done it to ourselves and we'll have done it with

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rhetoric like that.

And so, you know, we have free speech in this country, say what you want, but I think that it behooves both political parties to reject and repudiate public sentiments like that by their politicians.

And the fact that they're choosing not to, I think, is just loathsome.

In the paperback version of your book that's coming out this summer, you've added a little chapter about the events of January 6th.

Tell me how they connect to the theme of freedom and how you understand the events of that day is fitting into the broader conversation we've been having today.

So I felt like I had to address January 6th because the word freedom was used as the excuse to attack our nation's capital on January 6th.

You know, the previous time the capital building was targeted, of course, was by Al Qaeda on 9-11.

The fourth airplane that went down in Pennsylvania forced down by some very, very brave American passengers in a field of Pennsylvania, the target of that plane was the capital building.

And it wasn't attacked again until January 6th.

And on January 6th, it was attacked by American citizens and who were using the word the idea of their freedom to justify the grotesque violence they visited upon our capital.

And so I felt like in a book called Freedom, I had to sort of address the misuse of the word and the events of January 6th.

And my reference point was my father who grew up in Europe and moved to Spain in 1933.

And in '36, his family was forced out by the rise of fascism in Spain.

And it went down exactly like it did in this country in some ways.

The Democratic coalition, a liberal coalition, won the national election.

Franco said that in a conservative Catholic country like Spain, the only way for progressives to win an election is to steal it.

So the fact that they won proves it was stolen.

And that meant that anyone who serves in that government is a traitor and should be hung.

And that was his rationale for the war.

And unfortunately, he had the military on his side, which thank God in this country, the most democratic institution in this country is the military.

And they refused to go along with this nonsense.

I mean, but for a few yahoo's who were in the capital building itself as civilians.

So you buy the idea that it came close to being a coup?

Yeah, absolutely.

Absolutely.

I mean, listen, Trump wanted 10,000 National Guard soldiers to accompany him to the capital, to protect him, right?

If that's not a military coup, I come on.

But the military is too professional.

It wouldn't do that.

It knows fascism when it smells it, right?

What I talked about in this essay is the incredible power of democracy, like all of the fascists and authoritarian states of pre-war and post-war Europe, including the Soviets, all of them

failed.

All of them lasted, right?

One after another, they came down.

Even Franco managed to die, who wasn't shot or hung or killed himself, like Hitler did.

He actually managed to die in bed as an old man, which is pretty rare for a dictator.

But within months, Spain was a democracy after Franco died.

And democracies are very, very resilient and powerful.

They have economic treaties with each other.

They have military treaties with each other.

Attack one democracy.

You may wind up fighting all of them.

I mean, that's sort of what Russia is finding out with Ukraine.

So it's very stable, and they're very powerful.

Their economies are large, and so they can pay for big advanced militaries, and it works really, really well.

And so what I wanted to point out in this sort of deconstruction of January 6, where I compared it, I didn't even need to compare it.

I just wrote about what happened in Spain, and the comparison to January 6 is so obvious.

I didn't even need to mention it.

But that chapter is called The Last Five Minutes, because in the 1930s, the president of Czechoslovakia,

he watched the rise of fascism in Europe before World War II, and he said these amazing words.

He said, dictators always look good until the last five minutes.

And fortunately for humanity, there almost always is a last five minutes for these bastards.

And I just wanted those connections to fascism in Europe to be made clear in the context of January 6, because the most precious thing we have and our greatest asset, our most powerful defense, is our democracy.

And anything that threatens it internally is a grave threat to our national security, and really, really has to be dealt with.

I want to close by talking about how your views and also your personal life have evolved over the years, especially since a few years ago.

You had a very close brush with death, and it didn't happen on the front lines of a war.

It didn't happen as Taliban rockets rained down around you.

It happened in your own driveway of all places.

Tell me about what happened.

My experience in war zones, they've all been voluntary.

I'm not Ukrainian.

I'm not, you know, no one invited my country.

And I grew up, my 20s, it was a peacetime army before 9-11.

And so it's very different to choose to run a risk and then leave that place of risk-taking and come home.

You have agency.

You're making a choice.

You're making a deal.

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It's very, very different from what happened to me three years ago, where I gave up war reporting, I gave up risk-taking.

I had, you know, in my mid-50s, quite late, I had these two amazing little girls.

And you know, I finally, it settled into what I would call profound emotional freedom of all the different sorts of freedom.

Maybe the most profound is the sort of emotional freedom of, like, the point in my life is to protect and nurture and love these two little children.

And it's a profound liberation from the sort of concerns of the ego, right?

You know, it's like, ego, what ego?

I'm a father.

Like, you know, like, I don't matter.

I matter because I'm there for them.

And that's about it.

And that's one of the advantages of becoming a parent later in life.

So I gave up all that risk-taking and then one day, almost three years ago, I'd had sort of intermittent pain in my abdomen, which I sort of promptly ignored because I'm an idiot and I'm a guy and I just ignore stuff.

And all of a sudden, literally in mid-sentence, I felt this bolt of pain go through my abdomen.

I didn't know what it was and I stood up, I said, wow, something's really wrong.

I stood up and I almost fell over.

I didn't know it, but I had an undiagnosed aneurysm in my pancreatic artery and it ruptured at that moment.

And I was bleeding out into my own abdomen.

And I lost probably about 50% of my blood, which is right at the level, it's right at the limit of what they can bring you back from.

Beyond that, it's sort of, even if you get to the hospital, it's hopeless.

And it took 90 minutes to get me to the hospital.

I didn't know I was dying.

I knew something was very wrong, but I didn't know I was dying and I was in and out of consciousness

and we got to the hospital and I went off a cliff and the doctor asked permission to cut my neck open and put a line into my jugular vein to give me enough blood to keep me alive.

And as he was working on my neck, this black pit opened up underneath me and I started getting pulled into it.

And I knew, I didn't know I was dying, but I knew that if I went into that pit, I was never coming back and I didn't want to go.

And I started sort of panicking and right at that moment, my dead father appeared above me and in the sort of beautiful benevolent way, his arms were open and he was like, it's okay.

Like, you don't need to be scared.

You can come with me.

Like, I'll take care of you.

And I was like, come with you.

You're dead.

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I'm not going with you.

What are you talking about?

It's like, what?

And I said to the doctor, you got to hurry.

You're losing me right now.

I'm going.

And they barely got me back, took hours on a fluoroscope, trying to find and embolize the ruptured artery.

I was on the fluoroscope for so long, I got radiation burns on my back.

I got this little square red patch on my back that were radiation burns.

I called it square noble to my wife, she wasn't that, didn't find it that funny.

But I survived, right?

You know, as an atheist, non-mystic, like anti-mystic, the whole experience was quite confusing.

How do you understand the father that appeared to you?

How do you, I mean, would you describe what happened that day as a spiritual awakening?

Well, not quite.

I mean, what I would say, people kept saying, so do you believe in God now?

I'm like, I didn't see God.

I saw my dad, right?

We're not talking about God here.

But what we may be talking about, I mean, the human brain is amazing, but it does have its limits.

Einstein clearly pushed those limits about as far as they could go in understanding the physical nature of the universe and relativity and all that stuff.

It may be that there is a non-material, non-physical, post-death existence that we just don't understand.

Death may be a sort of threshold where you enter a dimension that's non-temporal and non-spatial.

I mean, I don't know, but I'm just sort of saying that it's possible.

It's either all neurochemicals in a situation of when you're sort of in extremis.

That's possible.

There's some flaws with that explanation.

Doctors favor that explanation because what happened to me is very, very common.

Everyone sees the dead when they're dying.

My mother died last year.

The room was filled with dead people as she went.

I mean, she was talking to them, right, including to her brother, who she didn't like very much.

She frowned and said, what's he doing here?

Right?

I was like, mom, it's your brother.

He came from a very long way away and you have to be nice to him.

She was like, well, we'll see.

I was like, okay, good luck.

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So it's super, super common, right?

And the explanation is neurochemical if you ask the sort of rationalist doctors, religious people think it's evidence of God.

As the son of a physicist, I think there may be just things about the nature of existence and life and death that we just don't understand, like in terms of quantum physics.

The explanation for what happened to me may even lay in something like quantum physics, the superposition of particles.

I mean, I don't know.

So I'm writing a book called Pulse about what happened to me and what the possible explanations are for what I experienced.

But I should say, I'll end with this, the level of trauma from what happened to me because it was supposed to be a place of safety, my home, because it was unexpected, because I have two little girls now, the level of trauma was off the chart, like way, way worse than combat.

It took me a long time to recover from, I'm still recovering from it.

How did it change your role as a father, your role as a husband?

I mean, God, this is going to sound so cliché, but there's some real truth to it.

I realize that none of us know whether we're going to make it till dinner time.

You don't, I don't, nobody knows what's going to happen in the next few hours, even a few minutes.

And the nation didn't know on September 10th what was going to happen the next morning.

I mean, none of us know.

There are asteroids out there that can take out the planet.

None of us know.

All we have is right now.

That's it.

Right?

And if you waste right now, regretting the past or worrying about the future or on your iPhone, if you waste right now in those ways, you are giving up the one thing that you know you have for sure is what's going on in your life at this moment.

And right now, the love and the responsibility and the connection and the profundity that is parenthood, that is life with children, like I didn't quite get it until I almost died.

And now I really get it.

And when she was two and a half, I asked my youngest daughter, I said, God, daddy loves you so much.

Do you realize how much daddy loves you when she sort of looked a little shy and I said, you know what love means?

Keep in mind, she's two and a half, right?

And she, you know what love means?

And she wouldn't answer.

I asked a couple of times, she finally looked at me and she said, yes, daddy, love means stay here.

She didn't mean medically, right?



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She meant like, if you love someone, you're with them.

End of sentence, right?

Like, I mean, that's no adult with, that's the ultimate definition of love and no adult would think of it.

You know, it takes a two and a half year old.

And so if you're in that place of stay here, whatever that may be, you are really living your life.

And I guess that's what I learned.

Sebastian Younger, that's a perfect place to end.

Thank you so, so much.

My pleasure.

I really enjoyed the conversation.

Thank you as always for listening.

If you have never heard of Sebastian Younger and now are ferociously Googling him wanting to learn more, or if you knew a lot about Sebastian Younger and this conversation just inspired you to be a tree climber or hitchhike along railroad lines, all of that's great.

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