FEAR.LESS

"I'M A PROJECTION OF OTHER PEOPLE'S FEARS OF THEIR BODIES FAILING THEM."

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BILL SHANNON

"I HAD NO IDEA WHAT I WAS SIGNING UP FOR"

"WHEN OLD THOUGHT PATTERNS ARISE, YOU HAVE TO ADDRESS THEM THAT VERY MOMENT"

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FEAR.LESS

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“It is never too late to be what you might have been.”

George Eliot

DIVE RIGHT IN

DOC HENDLEY

“I really do believe that you can be anybody and change the world.”

I was a bar tender from 2002 to around 2004, playing music in clubs before I started *Wine to Water*, the organization I currently run. I'd play guitar, butcher some old songs, and by the end of the night no one really cared how I sounded anyway - probably thought I was Johnny Cash or something. I was finishing up my degree at North Carolina State in Raleigh in communications, and I wasn't interested in working 9-5 for a big company. Frankly, I didn't even know what communications majors did. Only later on in life, after I started *Wine to Water* and begun speaking publicly, did I find the value in that degree!

REAPING WHAT YOU SOW

With the bar crowd, I loved the whole scene, the nightlife, the people. It was like a little community where you have your regulars, people you see every day when they come in after work. It was a community where people could relate to each other and help each other through hard times, as well as celebrate during good times. I realized I wanted to do something around that scene, that sense of community -- not simply bar tending and playing music -- I wanted to do more. I noticed the regulars who came in, and they had normal routine lives with their families. They'd come into the bar and do the usual, but they didn't have anything actionable besides that to do; they didn't seem to have other options.

> "It looked to me as if the bar folks weren't given another chance by the church crowd."

I likened it to church, where the one great thing is the opportunity for people to give back through service. The church crowd kept the bar crowd at an arm's length though, because although they had families and work, beyond that they just had the bar. It looked to me as if the bar folks weren't given another chance by the church crowd. I wondered, "If somebody created something for the bar crowd to serve and get involved in, how would they respond?" That was when a very small seed was planted in my mind.

DARK AND STORMY BRAINSTORMING

Then one night in December of 2003, it all sort of came crashing down in my mind. I couldn't sleep, so I stayed up and wrote down the idea for the organization, *Wine to Water*. I had written down the name even before I had any idea that lack of clean water was an enormous world issue. I remember writing, "Why water? What's the big deal with water?" It was that much of a mystery to me. It kind of fell onto the piece of paper and then I began researching; soon it became very clear why water. I learned that lack of access to clean water was killing more children in the world than anything else, and that over a billion people we're affected. I started understanding the conflict around water in various parts of the world, and I just couldn't under-

stand how people had it in them to pollute or take away the planet's most precious resource, something that people couldn't live without. I didn't know any of these facts. But after becoming aware of them, I became passionate about the topic because no one was talking about it; nobody even knew about it; it wasn't a public issue where people were even aware of the consequences.

I don't really talk about these details, I normally just skim over them and say, "I was tending bar and took notice of the water crisis and began to do something." But the real story is that I first wanted the group of people at the bar to be involved with something bigger than themselves. The idea of the organization just came to me; I can't take much credit for it. To be honest I felt it was a bit of a divine appointment, that perhaps since the church hadn't done much to connect with the group of people I cared about and saw so

"I'd love to say that I sat down and had a really in-depth plan, but it didn't work that way at all."

often at the bar, that maybe this was a way to connect the church to that group of people. So I had these two groups: the bar crowd, who didn't go to church because they felt judged and uncomfortable; and church crowd who never stepped foot in the bar. I just thought, "I want to gray up this area as much as I can."

I consider myself a Christian, but I'm different in the sense that I have varied opinions from the norm, from traditional religious society. I was never one to sit in church and simply believe what the preacher told me. I had to go back and look it up myself; and often I disagreed with what I was told. That's still how I am, and it's the driving force behind everything that I do. My faith plays a huge role; but the fact of the matter is that it plays itself out differently than someone who goes to church and believes everything and relies only on that.

"I really had no idea what I was signing up for."

I'd love to say that I sat down and had a really in-depth plan, but it didn't work that way at all. At first I thought, "All right, maybe I'll throw an event at a bar in Raleigh, and people will come and have a fun time. I'll give them drinks and see if we can raise some money for water." There was no agenda, like "Let's do this every week." It was more, "Let's see what happens." It took about a month to pull together the first event but it was surprisingly easy. We got free wine and beer sponsored, a DJ gave his time, and volunteers donated everything else. Everything we collected the first night, around $6,000, was all profit toward the cause. It was a big amount of money and made me think, "We can do this again."

The second time around, it was crazy. We got another $6,000 and now we had a lot of people giving. Yet I still wasn't sure what to do with it and asked myself, "How in the world do I turn this into clean water?" As a communications major, a bartender, a bad musician, I still had no idea how to do that!

"I was never one to sit in church and simply believe what the preacher told me. I had to go back and look it up myself"

"SEND ME"

So I had this $12,000 and wondered what to do next. I thought of giving it to an organization already doing good work, and my parents told me about *Samaritan's Purse* in North Carolina, an organization that drills wells around the world. I met with Kenny Isaacs who ran their water operations and basically said, "Look, I want to make sure that if I give you this money it's going to the water cause and nowhere else." I was quizzing him, so to speak, but he turned it around on me and asked, "Well, why are you even doing this? Why did you raise this money for free?" So I told him my story and he said, "Why don't you keep your money and come work for me?" He gave me a job right then and there and asked where I wanted to go. I said, "Just send me to the place with the most need."

I really had no idea what I was signing up for; all I knew was that he was going to send me to a place where I could learn more about water. He said, "I'll send you to a country in the most need; keep your money and you'll have to figure out how to turn it into clean water on your own." He emailed me about a month later saying that Darfur in Sudan was in really bad shape, *Samaritan's Purse* had no one the ground there, and he asked if I'd be willing to go.

So in August of 2004, off I went.

DARFUR

When I got there, I didn't realize how bad things were in Darfur; there were only about 230 aid workers on the ground then, and now there are well over 12,000. We were very new to the people there and I was completely new to my surroundings. Once I got there I was willing to help and do whatever they needed—water or anything else. I did a lot of different things—from attending security meetings, to helping with food distribution, to delivering plastic sheeting and mosquito nets.

After a while, *Samaritan's Purse* sent in more people, a security guy, and a full-time food person, freeing me to focus solely on water. UNICEF had someone who was great to me, took me under his wing and gave me books on emergency response regarding water, and walked me through everything.

Initially, I got overwhelmed when the professionals would tell me how to do work out there, as if that knowledge only came from a book or manual. But I can't learn like that. I'm more of a doer. When I went out and started doing things, it came a lot easier than having people try to teach me. It was trial and error. The first well I ever dug in Darfur is still there, but there's no water in it because I screwed it up. I make mistakes like everyone else. But the difference is that I don't sit and wait until I have everything perfect in my head before I do it. I'll drill a well and it gets water immediately and other times I'll mess up and need to figure it out. Regardless, I believe I can make water available a little bit quicker than somebody sitting in an office trying to plan it perfectly.

Sometimes even larger organizations, under-funded as they are, will plan everything to a 'T' writing grants perfectly to funders like UNICEF AND USAID and wait for the money to come. It might take months before they could fix or drill a well. I'd go out and kind of hack at it, figure something out. Two weeks later I may not have a $10,000 well drilled, but at least I've got people out there digging with shovels and picks. It's two different styles and both work, and I think there's a need for both in this field.

> "You can't be afraid to actually buy a plane ticket and go do something."

I found that I just couldn't wait.

FACEBOOK AND TRUST

When I was in northern Uganda, I had no idea what was going on. Seeing how bad it was and reading stories online about how water was such a huge need there, I decided I needed to be there. I saw something similar in Haiti, where there was so much need and so many things to be done, and no one knew where to begin. I just felt compelled to do something. I don't know if it's how I'm put together, but I don't really do too much thinking, I just try to do things. It is a bit nerve-wracking to think as you're going along, "What am I doing? How am I even going to get there?" And there are a lot of crazy and odd things that happen along the way. One time I ended up getting an email from someone in the Dominican Republic saying, "Hey, I can get you into Haiti. My dad runs a radio station in the Dominican Republic and he's

got a lot of connections." It was a Facebook message! Here I am, trusting someone on Facebook who tells me he'll airlift me in and I took his word for it. They picked me up at the airport, got me a helicopter, we flew into Haiti, and I met people doing great work. It's garbage when people say they need a master's degree in international development or training if they want to help. It's an excuse that ends up convincing people to do nothing. You can't be afraid to actually buy a plane ticket and go do something. Maybe that's a little harsh and I wouldn't necessarily do it exactly the way I did, but I really do believe that you can be anybody and change the world.

I don't have a master's degree, training, or special qualifications; I'm probably so normal that I'm a little bit abnormal. What I had going for me was that I do stuff. I believe people can become this way; you don't need to be born smart or strong or require specific training. In this type of work, you also need other people to help complement your skills along the way. When I began in Darfur, I worked with a great guy in the field, but we weren't a good fit because our approach was too similar, we didn't have the breadth of gifts necessary and were too overwhelmed by the details.

The one time I did start to worry was when I was spending a lot of lonely nights in the desert by myself thinking and doing a lot of praying, and it was the first time in my life where I felt like God was saying, "All right. You're about done with this here and it's not too long before you're going to have a family and wife." It was only when I met my then girlfriend, now wife, did I start to worry about something happening to me. That's when I began to seriously consider what it would mean to actually form *Wine to Water*, an organization that was devoted

only to the water cause; and I started thinking about it very realistically. I went home to North Carolina and was pretty overwhelmed still by everything I had seen abroad and the thought of forming an organization, but I went ahead anyway and started working on *Wine to Water*. We got an office in 2007 and we immediately hired Annie Clawson, who ended up being exactly who we needed, a perfect fit who added all the skills I lacked and who said, "Okay, you have this great idea, but how do we really do it?"

JUST GO

Wine to Water is still small, and more effective due to our commitment; and we are trying to focus as much as possible on doing the work. We've been able to raise around $800,000 so far. The expense of travel and lodging for Westerners to go to various parts of the world is immense, so it's much more effective to spend time and money with locals and then later on

bring over volunteers who can become advocates of the work when they come back home. What we tell people who are interested in helping is to organize an event, have friends over to your house, pour some wine, and raise some funds for a cause. We have a special kit on our website explaining how to host a fundraiser.

People tell me, "I want to get involved in this," or "I want to start an organization in Ethiopia." My first question is, "Well, have you been there?" They'll often say, "No, but I've heard about slave trafficking in Cambodia so I want to start an organization." What I tell them next usually freaks them out -- "Why don't you take some time, save up money, get a plane ticket and go there first?" That can scare them, "What do you mean, 'Go?' With an organization or a church?" They believe they'll need an armed guard or church van. But my best advice is to say, "Stop thinking so much because you'll find reasons not to go. Just go!"

DOC HENDLEY

Doc Hendley is the founder and president of ***Wine to Water***, which provides the resources and technology for constructing wells and other clean water and sanitation facilities in developing nations like India, Sudan, Ethiopia, Peru, Cambodia, Uganda, and South Africa. Wine to Water responded to the 2010 Haitian earthquake by providing a water purification system. In 2009 a panel of judges including Ted Turner, Gen. Colin Powell, Elton John, and Whoopi Goldberg selected Hendley as one of **CNN's** top ten heroes of the year. To date Wine to Water has provided sustainable clean drinking water to more than 25,000 people. Doc continues to play guitar and perform in North Carolina.

WHAT'RE YOU LOOKING AT?

"Other people's misgivings about disability are stronger than yours."

An Interview with
BILL SHANNON

Ishita: Was there a moment in your life where you thought, "I'm going to use my disability to be creative and turn it into a form of expression"?

Bill: The disability? There was never really a time where I stood outside of it. I was so young when I was faced with it that I immersed myself into who I was. A kid does that naturally. The whole notion that I 'changed' didn't occur to me. To say, "I have this thing, and I have to switch it," assumes there was a time where I considered it as something other than who I was. There was a whole process of engaging and revisiting my identity. Working from the inside out was a natural occurring evolution.

IG: This working from the inside out, how has that served you?

B: Until recently it served me quite well. Take the first gulf war, when I went to Washington, D.C. to demonstrate against the war. My parents were organizers, and very active around these issues, and it occurred to me how fragmented everybody was in having their own reasons for opposing the war. I didn't feel connected.

IG: To the cause? Connected to what?

B: I felt ineffective, that I wasn't really communicating. I realized that to more effectively express my opposition to the war, I had to go over to the other side, join the Pro-War demonstrators. They're waving their American flags and have yellow ribbons, and their kids have signs like "Saddam is Evil," "Support America." The pro-war demonstrators were cordoned off; it was a smaller group of families, military people, and young Republicans. I went over hoping to shift the focus, undermine the fuzzy notion of America trying to instill democracy. I tried to manifest the essence of what it means to drop bombs on people. I started foaming at the mouth and screaming blood-curdling slogans, "We're Number One!" "Kill Saddam!" Soon the "Support our Troops" pro-war people began to slowly edge away from me.

IG: Why?

B: I was manifesting the heart of what I was opposed to. But I flipped it. I created a stronger representation of what it actually meant to support the war. Some were taken aback by it, but others joined in with my foaming and chanting. Somehow, we turned this pro-war contingent into a howling, bloodthirsty mob.

IG: How did you pull it off, convince them you weren't being ironic?

"You're forced to be creative due to the demands of the situation."

B: I was sharpening. I was immersing myself, transforming, to get through to what I felt was expressing opposition by embodying someone completely insane -- essentially trying to express notions of murder and hate, but expressing it like a performance artist. I wanted to get the guys yelling, "Kill Saddam" to understand that. Before long, they were like, "Wait a second this is getting out of hand."

IG: So you were screwing with their heads by going in the opposite direction. You went directly to the heart of it to express the emotion?

B: Yeah, but it also did something else; it created a kind of cipher for the anti-war demonstrators to have a visceral relationship with what they were opposing.

IG: Is there something similar to that spontaneity when you dance – either with crutches or a skateboard? Is there a balance between performing and who you inherently are?

B: It's a similar philosophy, altering the place where I'm stuck. At the demonstration I was stuck, ineffectual. As a performer whose work is physical, there's this public image of me flying around on a skateboard and dancing la-Dee-dah, and the truth is that comes at a fairly serious price. I don't have public work that explores the pain element of what I do. That's sort of who I am.

IG: Is that something you had to face when you transitioned from being

on crutches to being able-bodied? I know there were a lot of emotions at that time – did you ever ask "Am I really who I think I am?"

B: That was a big question for me. I never mentally separated from them as a way of seeing the world. I was physically off of crutches during my teenage years but even while appearing able-bodied I was conscious of a weak leg and a strong leg, a shorter leg and a longer leg, a flexible leg and a stiff leg. I mentally guarded my weaker, more vulnerable leg and formed many of movements around those limitations even within the framework of appearing able-bodied.

I was lucky to have a lot of strong cultural influences right when I got off my crutches to delve into and express my identity, though even when I wasn't using crutches I didn't stand outside of the context of disability. Those forms saved me from what I would have done if I hadn't discovered hip-hop and skateboarding and urban arts. I would be walking on the street and see somebody reading the paper and they wouldn't look at me. But as soon as I got past them a bit they would turn around and look. As a kid I knew this was happening, but the people around me wanted to suspend the notion of my spectacle until after I passed, as if I didn't know I was a spectacle. When I was seven years old I totally knew what was happening. I knew that as soon as I walked passed them, they'd look - so I would turn right after I passed them and look back. Catch people off-guard. It was kind of an early education: everything you're getting is not the truth. People don't want to face things. I'm a bellwether of other people's projections of their own fears, of their own bodies failing them. It's very human. People are cut differently and all the other aspects of identity that roll into it have an effect.

> "I went over hoping to shift the focus, undermine the fuzzy notion of America trying to instill democracy."

IG: I was surprised when I read the phrase "Cream of Cripples." What's your relationship with that phrase?

B: It's a derogatory term, but carries a different connotation within the disabled community than it does in the general community. It defines the gradations of who is what - the extent of people's disabilities. There are other derogatory points of reference -- like a high "drool factor" and things like that. There's different slang within the disabled community. If you think about it, it's actually really natural. You have light-skinned blacks, dark-skinned African-Americans. In high school for instance the light-skinned girls were the queens of the school. They would always make fun of darker skinned girls. Even in that gradation there's always going to be issues of class, race, and gender and all these imposed and irrational hierarchies.

IG: Are you in chronic pain with Legg-Calve Perthese Syndrome?

B: My analogy is: You're walking in a desert and you have a glass of water. You have to walk all day and if you guzzle all your water at the beginning of the day, you're screwed." So the equivalent is that my water would be going on my skateboard and going for a skate or dancing for an hour, and that's taken all my water for the day. I don't have any water for the rest of the day. So it depends on what my pacing is through the day and how I use my legs.

IG: Doesn't breaking and skateboarding highlight your disability? They help you express yourself wonderfully and it's grown into a personal style, but has it ever challenged you to see your physical limitations in that way?

B: When I first found those forms, I wasn't using crutches but I still related to what it meant to have a disability. Again, I never stood outside of it. I was still limited in terms of my execution, even not being on crutches, and bringing crutches back into those forms was a slow and evolving process of realizing, together with the technical evolution of the crutches, to keep pushing myself. To make it something else. I could no longer actually skateboard like I used to, so I had to make it different. It became a dancing - skateboarding form, and that was just what worked for me.

IG: What did it mean to see yourself as an able-bodied person?

> "When I was seven years old I totally knew what was happening."

B: Well, I didn't see myself as that. The world did.

IG: To the world's perception of being able-bodied - What was that like for you?

B: It was a relief on a number of levels. I didn't have to deal with people's projected narratives. That's really the biggest change. I grew up as a spectacle, always like the center of attention and not just because of the braces but also because of my character. The combination of the two. So part of it also was the discovery of the counter-culture helped me have a presence, to delve into a style and a way to be. Even if I wasn't getting the same level of attention, I was just another kid -- which was a relief.

People with disabilities are still playful and you don't have any misgivings about it. Other people's misgivings about it are stronger than yours. You find yourself constantly breaking the rules in terms of others' notions of who you should be, and it becomes comfortable, and it becomes second nature. Nowadays it's come to the point where I really don't care what other people think. At all. To a fault. If you ask my wife, "Is it great that Bill has no concept of truly caring what other people think or how they feel about who he is?" she would say "No, that's not a plus, that's a negative."

IG: Why?

B: Because she can't take me to a party.

IG: Have you been that way your whole life?

B: At the Art Institute of Chicago I pretty much carved my own way – I wasn't in a particular program. In all my institutions -- from failing high school because I thought it was a waste of time, to failing summer school after I failed high school. I just did what I wanted to do; and it can be problematic because I grew up that way. I call it "creative necessity." It's creativity as a survival tool, which is a common thread in hip-hop, where you have to create something out of nothing in order to survive. You're forced to be creative due to the demands of the situation. Not literal survival, like life or death, but social survival, peer-group survival. That type of pattern started super-early, on the playground—I'm going to either come up with some creative solution or I'm going to be left behind by my peers. Repeatedly having to do that throughout my early childhood up until I was 11 or 12 years old fed immediately into skateboarding and breaking -- two cultural forms that you have to establish a distinct path to achieve. There's no team sport, there's no structure to climb - it's make your own path, referencing others along the way, but certainly the true artists are the ones who were independent and had their own territory and style.

"People with disabilities are still playful..."

IG: Was there a point where you couldn't find a creative solution to something?

B: It was later in life where I became disconnected, really lost. Basically, it was because of the notion of 'owning something.' I owned being on crutches. I owned my opposition to the war. I made it mine. With my other work, like video installation art, that work was mine. It's unique to my process and that sense of being singular has been a theme for me. Originality and not looking around me. I hardly look at anything, as far as going to art openings or museums. I actively shy away from looking at art that might influence me too much, though lately I've been looking at more video art than I used to.

IG: Why is it slowly changing? Why the initial resistance to it?

B: Part of the change has to do with getting older and not feeling threatened by outside influences. I know who I am at this point, my connection to the juice, my essential creativity if you will, is not going to fall apart if I look at art. I'm not going to let it get into my stream of consciousness. I feel like subconsciously those things change you. I feel like there's a lot of information out there and knowledge is an important thing - and I've had it - and my knowledge has been street knowledge, gaining knowledge from experience. Through lived knowledge, not from showing up at some place and looking at something.

IG: Not passive experience...?

B: Not by design, it's by fate. Allowing those things to happen and learning and gaining from something that - I didn't have to plan it – it's naturally who I am. But it's limiting because you

have one path in life, and if you decide to, you can broaden your horizons and broaden your spectrum. If I had never stepped out of my world to go look at other things and tried to take in new forms and other artists' work, it wouldn't have been the same. It's a way to have a dialogue with the world. I know artists who "make it" and they reference all these philosophers and different artists and historical figures in their work, and they're very referential and their work is a take-off and mix of all these influences that people can put a handle on. I don't give anyone handles. I don't have any handles. I'm not using Marx or Brecht or Shakespeare or whoever. The nature of my work comes through my path in life.

Even when I come across someone whose work is similar to mine, for example there's a man, Irving Goffman, who wrote about how people put on a big performance in life, wherein everything is pageantry, and he wrote all these different observations of sociological construction standing on the outside of life and categorizing everything. He's someone who I do talk about a bit, actually. If you look at my work, you have to imagine it, and this is coming from a friend who's known me for almost 20 years. He said: "Bill, your work is like a pie, and you have all these different slices and directions and people look at you through one or the other slice. There's just too much information. Too many different divisions in what you do for most people to want to engage at all. Creating momentum and push from any particular direction is weakened by the fact that there's all these other directions pulling away." Nothing evolves quickly. It's

> **"I grew up as a spectacle, always the center of attention and not just because of the braces but also because of my character."**

like each thing creeps along, and the only way to absolutely get things done is to be sure to only do work that has a deadline.

IG: Do you have fear of failure – as a visual or performance artist?

B: Well, I don't think there is a way to fail at how I do things. There's no bar, no Archimedean point. You might say the standard is making money, but that's not a real measure of success. It's only a measure of comfort. As far as achieving in the arts, I feel like I've been very successful in creating a body of work. If you're an artist, and you have a hard time making work, then you'll know what I'm talking about. I've been through a phase where I had a really hard time being productive and I was stuck in this spot of trying to get through a challenge. I wasn't able to do anything.

IG: What's the first thing you do in a fearful situation?

B: Like genuinely profound fear? The worst thing that can happen is that you can die, and I'm not scared of that. Every other fear is undermined by lack of fear of death. I realized that in the past few years, I've come to accept that I'm not really scared to die anymore, or totally scared at least. And that comes from being really scared at one point in time in my life – going through a challenging time where I felt lost. But I've realized that fear doesn't change the situation. You're scared or you're not. It's still there. You're still there. I'm not going to be scared; I'm not running away. I'm here and that's it. That's the simple truth of it. I'm here and whatever it is, it is.

IG: Some think that you should do what you fear most...

B: No. I don't think fear is a compass. If I fear something most, it doesn't mean I should necessarily do it as

opposed to releasing that same fear. A lot of people behave out of fear, mistaking it for politeness - I'm scared I'll upset someone so I won't say this because I don't want to create a problem. The bigger problem is not being able to speak honestly because of other people's limitations on dealing with the truth, the reality of life.

IG: That's the crux of it. Is there something you can touch upon that's been a positive thing coming out of your experiences?

B: It's a hard process because as an artist you're battling with yourself internally. Once you recognize that, you're able to turn the corner and stop digging a hole for yourself. You're filling up that hole, actually. There's pain in that process, and while the ghost of the "other you" will always be with you, the gift is that you're a new person.

BILL SHANNON

Bill Shannon is a performance artist who has choreographed his pieces using his customized rocker-bottom crutches as well as a skateboard. As a young boy he was diagnosed with Legg-Calve-Perthese Syndrome. A graduate of The Art Institute of Chicago, he has traveled throughout the United States and the world, garnering acclaim for his unique creative energy and edgy sensibility that combines elements of hip-hop, street dance, social criticism, and modern dance. In 1996 Shannon moved to NYC and immersed himself in the art, dance and skate cultures of Brooklyn and Manhattan, expanding his work to multimedia video installations, ensemble dance incorporating crutches and skateboards, and theatre. His awards are numerous and include a John Simon Guggenheim Fellowship. He now lives in Pennsylvania and farms, blogs, and continues to perform. He may be best known to the general public for a dance sequence he performed for the VISA "Life Flows Better" television **commercial** in 2009.

"We rise to the level at which we are willing to expand to."

EXPERIENCE IS THE TEACHER

An Interview with

JACQUELINE WALES

Ishita Gupta: In your life-coaching business "The Fearless Factor" you ask people what they can learn from a former alcoholic, global nomad, and late-blooming singer, who got her black belt at 49 in Shotokan Karate. What do your clients learn from you?

Jacqueline Wales: I help people connect with what is true. People can find and use that part of themselves that already knows, "I am really good enough. I'm good enough no matter what. The challenges that come up in my life, I am perfectly equipped to meet them." People can learn how to stop living in fear.

IG: Do you recall the time in your life when you decided to stop living in fear?

JW: Well, once I was sitting in my therapist's office. I was in chaos, craziness, having left two children behind, and pregnant with a baby girl. My past was telling me to fear, in my heart and mind I knew, "She will leave me before I leave her." And I made a commitment to see it through, my life with her, to do what it would take for her to grow up to be a healthy individual. It was a powerful moment to understand I could choose what to do with my life. I was thirty-five years old and my history was strewn with children I'd abandoned and so much damage I'd left in my wake. My feeling at this moment was "Enough, it has to stop."

"The challenges that come up in my life, I am perfectly equipped to meet them."

IG: Can you tell us about your history...How did you come to that conclusion?

JW: My father was an out-of-control alcoholic, angry and disrespectful, and he took it out on our family. I was held to very high standard at an early age by a man who didn't have any standards at all. There was regular physical abuse. When my mother was pregnant with her forth child, my father said, "Have this child and I will kill myself," which led my mother to attempt to give herself an abortion. My brother was born severely developmentally disabled. As the eldest I was expected to care for him, partly because my mother had to work. So I grew up dodging my father's alcoholic rages and expending enormous energy taking care of my brother.

IG: What happened as you became an adult?

JW: It translated into self-abusive behavior. I quit school by 15 and got into drugs and alcohol. I got pregnant before the age of 20, and gave up the baby for adoption. I didn't want to raise her the same way I'd been raised. I married the first guy who said, "I love you" and immediately had another child to replace the baby I had given away. It was disastrous. I finally left Edinburgh for London in my teens; I was following a destructive path with alcohol and drugs. At twenty-nine, I set off from London with a backpack and $800 to go to Australia. I left my son behind with his father, feeling a desperate need to get away from everything. On my way, I somehow ended up in San Francisco and thought I'd stay there a while and then eventually head for Sidney.

IG: Did you have a plan at that point?

JW: I wanted to be a teacher; I had finished a degree,

"Enough, it has to stop."

the first person in my family to go to college but I didn't know what was gong to happen. I was flying by the seat of my pants, and it was an instance of stepping off the face of a cliff. Here's the thing about fear: most people will wait until their backs are against the wall before they move. I was desperate, desperate to get out of what was going on in England, so obviously I wasn't clear about the ramifications of my choices.

IG: What happened when you got to San Francisco?

JW: I didn't have much money, a place to stay, or a job. Somehow I knew there was something better for me, I stopped on a beach in California, and had this intuitive moment, feeling sure I was about to experience a seismic shift in my life. It took another five years for me to say "Enough. Let's see what I can do differently."

IG: When you were in AA battling alcohol, it wasn't your drinking, it was your thinking that overwhelmed you?

JW: Change your thinking and change your life. In five years of AA I realized drinking is about behavior. It wasn't really about my drinking, it was my thinking. I give credit to a lot of people who showed up at different times in my life and said, "There is another way to do this." I always say in my coaching practice "Are you coachable? Will you be able to listen and take advice?" That has been my saving grace over the years. I work with my clients not just on breaking habits, but replacing them with new habits. It takes 21 days to work on it. When old thought patterns arise, whatever they happen to be, whether it's "I'm stupid" or "I'm not worth it," you have to address it at that very moment. You have to keep committing to yourself over and over again, and it can be painful. A tremendously powerful question to ask yourself is, "What am I willing to give up?" We do have to give something up in order to get what we want, whether a person is dealing with a damaging relationship, a career that's not working out, or simply is asking if there is more to what they really want.

IG: Do we delude ourselves into believing something's right when we're just rationalizing?

JW: Something I do when

"I was following a destructive path with alcohol and drugs."

> “Here’s the thing about fear: most people will wait until their backs are against the wall before they move.”

I’m in a negative state of mind is to ask: “Is this the truth?” Is this the truth of the matter? When you’re spinning your wheels and you’re feeling like a hamster in a cage, and you’ve got this thinking going on about whether you’re good enough, slow it down and ask if the feeling is really true. The answer, nine times out of ten, is no. When negative stuff comes up for my clients, I ask them to create index cards and write it down, but on the other side write the positive things. Put the comparison in front of your eyes. It becomes a matter of which side you’d rather go with. Keep the positive side of the card in front of you for the rest of the day and see what happens to your thinking. It’s about reprogramming our brains. People say, “I’m too old to change.” That’s nonsense. We’re constantly in a process of change. The brain itself, as you probably know, is very plastic. We know that you can rewire the circuits to do things differently. That’s what I do in my coaching - help people rewire their circuits.

IG: Did anyone do that for you?

JW: Yes, I needed mentors to show me how to do it, because I didn’t know. Coming from a working-class background, I didn’t think I had any brains. The woman who handled the adoption of my first child said, “You know, you’re smarter than you think you are.” She arranged for an IQ test, and I got a good result, and she said, “See? That proves it. Go get your degree.” She was the first person to guide me in that direction. But there were many people along the way. I had a psychologist who I ran into when I was about 26, he started asking me questions about my background. I remember clearly when it got down to the emotional stuff, it was as if a steel door came down. I wasn’t letting anybody in. Same thing when I got my first massage, the woman told me, “You’re like an armadillo. I can’t even get in here.” It was interesting to see how much our bodies, mine in particular, retained so much of my emotional pain. It was just sitting in my body. As humans, we carry a lot of our emotional charges in our bodies and we’ve got to find a way to release that.

IG: And fear?

JW: I was at a workshop given by Sam Keen, who wrote *Fire in the Belly*, and he said, “Fear is the sharp edge of excitement.” I got chills when I heard that because I thought, “All my life I’ve felt

"Drinking is about behavior."

like I was walking a razor's edge." For years I called myself a "Chaos junkie." I loved creating drama - it was the way I got my kicks. I'd create drama despite knowing how destructive it was in the long run.

IG: How did you start writing?

JW: I wrote my first short story and my writing teacher asked, "How long have you been doing this?" I said it was my first story. She said, "Get out of here!" It gave me a sense that there was more I could do. Each place along the road there's been someone who said 'There's more that you can do.' I've been very blessed to have that kind of extraordinary spiritual, emotional, physical support throughout my life. My husband, who I've been married to for 30 years, is the one who saw me long before I saw myself.

IG: You met him in San Francisco?

JW: Yes. About three months into my stay there we met through a mutual friend. We were two people who were the least likely to succeed. We had a very fine relationship until I got pregnant and said, "I don't know if I can do this." He said, "You can do this. Don't worry about it. We will do this." There we were and the journey began. He's always been behind me the whole way, and God bless him, he still keeps showing up for me.

IG: We're you afraid that you would fall back into old patterns?

JW: It was on my mind every single day. Fear got out of bed with me every single day, and I thought "Can I do this right? Can I do it justice? Am I capable?" I needed the attention. I craved attention. People had to keep telling me I was good, "You're good. You have to keep doing this." Then a friend came up and said "You'll never be okay unless you fill the hole inside of you." Now, as a professional, I get to fill the hole in others and that is the ultimate gift. It's about giving something back and believing in yourself because you don't need something or someone else to fill you up

IG: Where is the line between getting support from others and relying on oneself?

JW: That transformation is something nobody can teach you. I can say it until I'm blue in the face, "You're really great; you're doing fine," but until you really start tapping into your sense of self, your belief in yourself, it doesn't matter. You

> "I give credit to a lot of people who showed up at different times in my life and said, 'There is another way to do this.'"

must reach into your core, into your belief in yourself. It's a critical point of contentment. You connect to that place within you where you know you're equipped to handle what comes your way.

IG: Along with professional singing in Europe and writing fiction, you also got into Martial Arts?

JW: As a Martial Artist, there's a process which involves discipline and focus. It involves commitment and follow-through. All of these elements are very much a good part of life. I learned that when I took up Martial Arts at the age of 43, after watching my kids doing Tae Kwon Do. I thought, "I've always wanted to try this, I think I'll give it a shot." I was like a duck to water; I ended up with a red belt in Tae Kwon Do before shifting disciplines and getting a black belt in Shotokan Karate on my 49th birthday. People looked at me and wondered, "How could you do that on your 49th year?" My only response was, "How could I not?"

IG: What did Martial Arts do for your writing and coaching?

JW: It's something I'm passionate about and something that inspires me. The strength that I learned from many years of doing Martial Arts was that it permeated everything in my life. Because the discipline and follow-through that I received helped me deal with changing situations, which at times were fairly radical in my family life. And Martial Arts helped me bring out the best in myself – so I could do the same in other situations then as well.

IG: Personally, Martial Arts - the discipline and action –really helped combat negative thoughts and take action...

JW: You just nailed it: action. You have to take action. The problem is people will sit and wallow. They allow their head to run the show. When you take action to step out of whatever limitations you're confronted with, that's when you start to see the action is making a difference. When I started my business of being a motivational speaker and spreading the word about the capability to get beyond the fear, it was a very fearful time for me. I felt, "Who are you to get out there and tell people how to deal with this

> "When old thought patterns arise, whatever they happen to be, whether it's 'I'm stupid' or 'I'm not worth it,' you have to address it at that very moment."

stuff?" It only became clear later on when I analyzed it that really, every single experience I had led me to this point. I was 54 at that moment, and now I'm 58 years old. So at the age of 54 I'm thinking, "Okay, you want to get out there and talk to people about how to get beyond their fears. Where are your credentials? Where are your materials? What do you have?" The answer at that moment was, "Nothing." But I knew I had a good idea and I thought it was worth something. I marshaled all that discipline and focus and that being in the moment to realize, "What do you need to do here?" I made a lot of mistakes along the way, took wrong turns, wasted money, but eventually I found what I was looking for. One of the things I say in my book, *The Fearless Factor*, is failure is a huge issue for so many people. They don't start because they're afraid to fail. Really, we're all failing our way to success. If you understand that we're all failing our way to success then there's only one word you need to use when things don't work out: "Next. What's next?" For me that word "next" became important because at times it felt very fearful to think, "You've spent too much money, you haven't done the right things, nobody's coming, you can't get any clients, blah blah blah." But I trained myself the same way I did in Martial Arts to stay on task, to see where it needs to go and to follow through all the way so that I got the results I was looking for. This year things are going gangbusters and I find I'm quite happy.

IG: Your credentials are your life experiences...

JW: That's exactly the conclusion I came to. After a couple of other people said, "Are you kidding me? Look back over this last fifty-three years!" When I look at where I came from to where I am now, I'm on a different planet.

IG: What about a scarcity mentality and fear of bad financial situation - how do we combine what we love with something that is also sustainable?

JW: When people say to me, "I don't have any money" it's not about the money. It's about your attitude. So yes, you can be broke. You can definitely be sitting there with 50 bucks in the bank and trying to figure out how to make things work. It's about learning to think past limitations to see opportunity. Because right now, there are a million opportunities out there simply because there are too many people sitting on the corner afraid to make a move. If you're going to be entrepreneurial or enterprising, you're going to find the ways to achieve what you need. I've always said in my life that I've had enough to get by. I've never had a point in my

> "A tremendously powerful question to ask yourself is, 'What am I willing to give up?'"

> "Fear got out of bed with me every single day, 'Can I do this right? Can I do it justice? Am I capable?'"

life where I was completely destitute. I have no fantasies about me being a bag lady. I know I'll manage to find something to work it out. I think that's true for everybody. But when you give in to that defeatism, when you give in to "I have no other options," well, that's nonsense. There are always options. I'll come back to Martial Arts. You remember in your training when you'd have times when you really didn't want to do another routine or another repetition. Your sensei is standing there going, "Again. Again." And you want to kill him, because you have no energy left. It's like, "I'm done." My teacher once told me, "You do your best work when you're totally exhausted, because all your defenses are down." I thought to myself, "That's true. When we're in an occasion of being really challenged, your defenses are down." That's when you find your real strength, when you can really tap into your courage, when you can tap into the possibilities that are there for you. But you have to be willing to take that action of taking the next step. I don't run and hide from my fear anymore. I don't try to bury it or pretend it's not there. I don't try to create diversions for myself. When fear shows up, for me, it's usually an uncomfortable feeling in my stomach and then maybe the radio in my head will start playing. I then have to look at it and say, "Okay, so what are you avoiding here? What is it that you're afraid to step into?" Once I've had that conversation then it's time for me to take action to move beyond it. I won't get anywhere if I don't take that first step.

IG: What's been the most useful advice that has helped you?

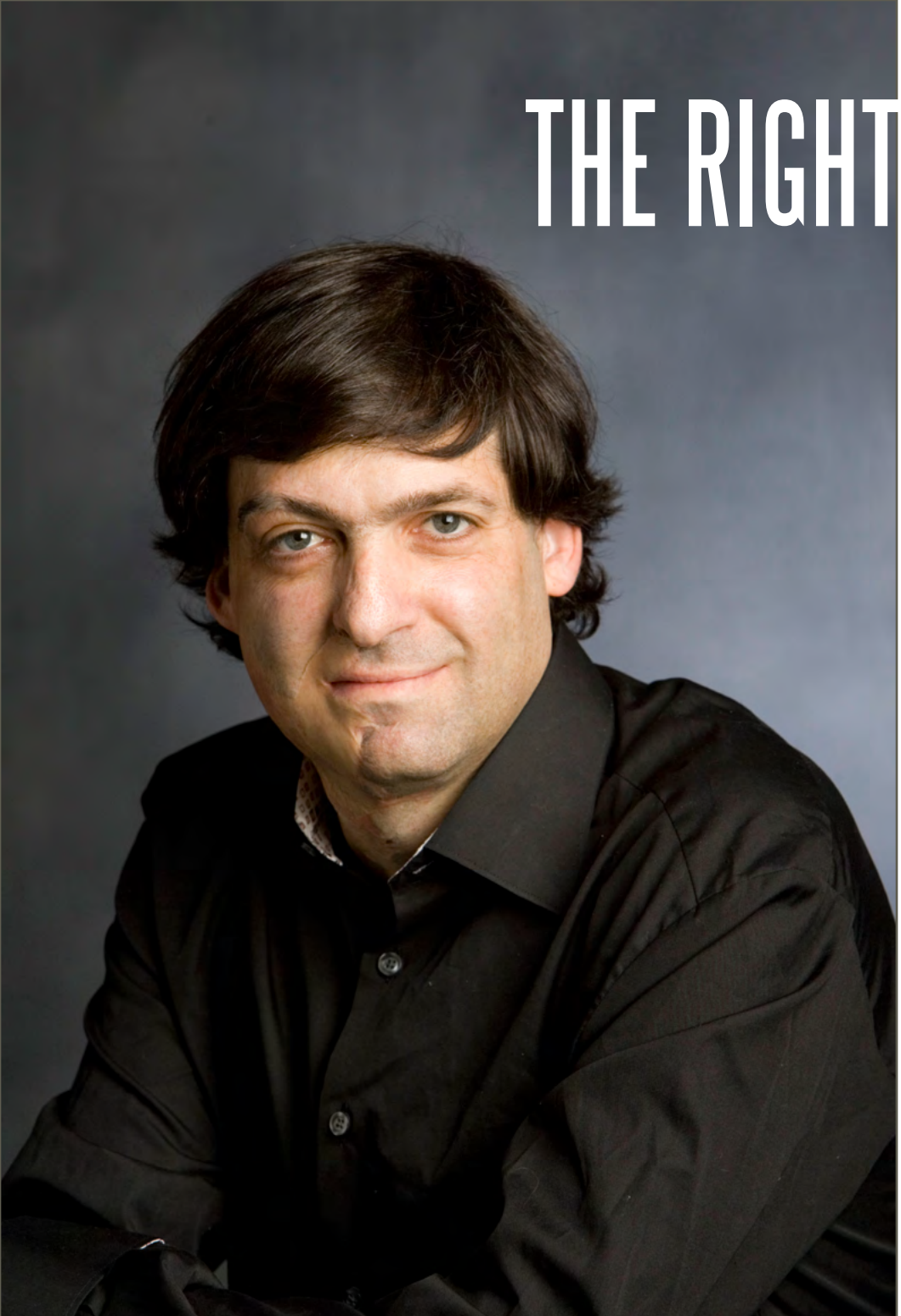
JW: "Believe in you" is really a big one. "Believe in you." It was pointed out to me by several people in the earlier part of my change process that I had something important to share with the world and that I shouldn't hide from sharing it. When I started this business, I was in a seminar once where I told people about my feeling "small." The instructor said to me, "Why do you want to choose that op-

tion?" Then only did it hit home. Why did I want to choose that option? We rise to the level at which we are willing to expand to. If I can get people to understand that fear is an option, that moving beyond the fear is also an option and that it's about the choices we make when fear shows up, then we can rise to our fullest extension.

> "Right now, there are a million opportunities out there simply because there are too many people sitting on the corner afraid to make a move."

JACQUELINE WALES

Jacqueline Wales is a life coach and motivational speaker who lives and works in New York City and Bali. She began her writing career in her 40s, eventually authoring five books including a memoir, **When the Crow Sings.** Her latest venture, **Fearless Factor**, lays out unique techniques for personal growth. She's a red belt in Tai Kwon Do and a black belt in Karate. She is a frequent guest on radio and television and has appeared on ABC Business Weekend, Be Happy Dammit on Sirius Radio and PBS Night Business Report.



THE RIGHTSIDE OF IRRATIONALITY

"Human beings adapt. Even if you believe you won't be able to handle something, you end up adjusting to it."

An Interview with

DAN ARIELY

Ishita Gupta: You were born in the United States but went to university in Israel. Now you teach at Duke. When were you injured?

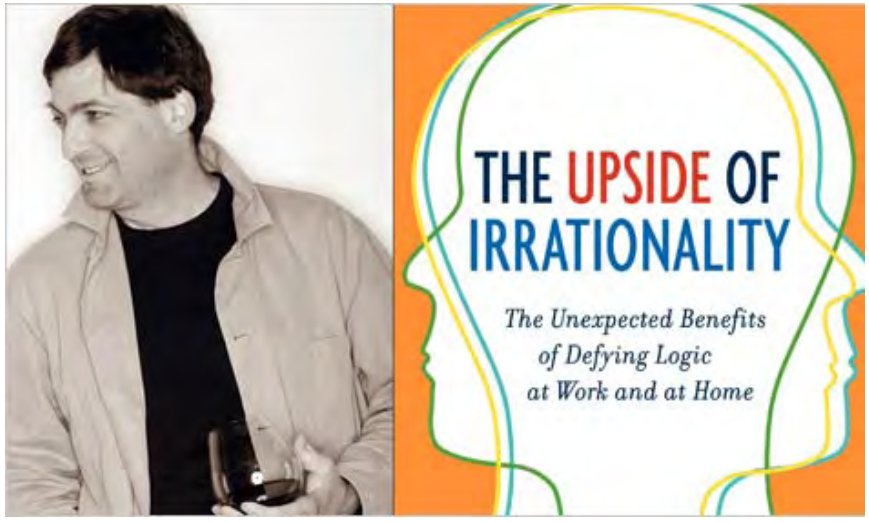
Dan: At that time I was 18, living in Israel, I was at a youth meeting to make some fire signs for an event.

I: What happened?

DA: I was badly burned over 70% of my body by the explosion of a flare, which is a big magnesium ball. It's supposed to light up a battlefield, so it's very bright and very hot. I had deep burns on about 30% of my body— my hands for instance, were charred beyond the skin and you could see the bones and tendons. I spent almost three years in a hospital.

I: You literally had to walk through the fire from the explosion to escape?

DA: Yes, that's true. Strangely enough, I only began to feel the intense pain once I'd gotten out and was lying on the ground afterward waiting for someone to come and help me. Initially, I didn't really understand the severity of it all. When it happened I knew it was very bad and life threatening, but I somehow felt that it would also just go away.



> "It was painful to put on, tore skin, was hot and itchy, but had the advantage of keeping my scars invisible."

I: In your book, *Predictably Irrational*, you write about changing bandages during your recovery.

DA: It was about how to remove bandages from burn patients -- slowly and with lower intensity over a longer period of time or quickly with a shorter but higher pain level. My nurses did it quickly, but I begged them to do it more slowly for me. In *Predictably Irrational*, I describe my research showing the best answer was what I'd screamed to the nurses - that it's less painful to remove the bandages slowly over an extended period of time than it is to remove them quickly.

I: How did you battle the social assumptions of what happened to you?

DA: I left the Hospital to go to University still wearing a special jumpsuit. It put pressure on the recovering tissue, covering everything from head-to-toe except my eyes, ears, and mouth. It was painful to put on, tore skin, was hot and itchy, but had the advantage of keeping my scars invisible. I actually drew comfort from that. In the long term it was very

difficult, especially given my young age, trying to find my place in the social hierarchy.

I: Can you explain some of the ways it's influenced your academic work as a Behavioral Economist?

DA: It brought me to various questions. For instance, how do you endure painful treatments on a daily basis that are potentially useful in the long term? In the hospital I was unable to participate in any social activities. I would see my friends and family behaving in similar ways to how they'd behaved before. All of a sudden I wasn't a part of that. It's interesting how being unable to do "every day" activities we take for granted, changed my perception. Activities like even eating and bathing. It only took a few months of being tube-fed, not chewing or tasting, for it to feel unnatural when I was given a fortified milkshake. The first time I had to take a bath by myself, they helped me down into the bath. But when it came to getting back out, I had no memory of how to get out of the bath. I had just totally forgotten how after not doing it for such a long time. It's the social aspect that is so curious. I was looking at the life my friends were leading -- social customs, politeness, people getting into couplehoods and breaking up, politics, all kinds of things – and it became quite odd. I looked at myself like I was observing things from an outsider's perspective. Like an alien.

> "It's interesting how being unable to do "every day" activities we take for granted, changed my perception."

I: Every day life became odd?

DA: What was odd is that

> “I think that having to deal with loads of physical pain helps us deal with critical mental pain.”

it didn’t look natural. When you’re into some social dance or particular activity, it appears to you as natural. But when you step out of that context you suddenly ask, “Is this really a natural way to behave? Is that the way we should behave towards each other? Towards other people? Why are we doing this?” This slight outside perspective, beyond the specific issues of hospital life, has stayed with me. Though it’s been many years, and despite that my physical difficulties are diminished, the experience has influenced my perspective.

I: Has the experience of extreme physical pain made it easier to deal with psychological pain?

DA: I think that having to deal with loads of physical pain helps us deal with critical mental pain. I now know exactly how bad things can go. When people rate pain, it’s usually on a scale of zero being no pain and a hundred being the worst pain you can imagine. But notice something, for me, my 100 is now much higher: I can imagine loads of pain and since I know I can live through it, the fear of that

pain is now in relative terms lower. How does that help with emotional pain? It's a question of perspective. How bad are things? Well, it could have been much worse; and keep in mind that a person with a severe injury has daily reminders -- I not only see my scars but I have some pain, some limitations remaining, and that's a daily reminder of how things could have been. People use the term "keeps you in proportion," but it's true, it does help keep things in proportion.

I: Can you think of a specific example?

DA: In the hospital, there was a girl who tried to commit suicide. She was 17; her boyfriend left her, so she cut her wrists. She also put Ajax in the wounds, so she needed additional skin transplants to deal with those chemical burns. It basically snapped her back into it. Here she was, believing it was the end of her world, and all of a sudden she experienced tremendous pain, and in some sense got a new perspective. I don't think that perspective is worth the agony. But it's definitely a different perspective.

> "I somehow assumed that when the scars healed, the pain would end."

I: How did you keep yourself from despairing in those three years in the hospital?

DA: It's complicated. Let me answer it this way. After five months, they introduced me to someone that was supposed to cheer me up. As a burn survivor he had done very well. He had extensive scars, he was a car mechanic and his hands had been badly burned. He could somehow manage to use his hands though to do all kinds of things. In fact, he depressed me much more than he helped me. Instead of being somehow inspired, his story made it occur to me that the scars don't go away; the limitations and deformities are long lasting. That was one big misperception I had. The second big misperception had to do with what it means to get better. Once I understood things were going to be different, I somehow assumed that when the scars healed, the pain would end. I didn't realize that when the scars heal to the extent that no burns remain, they remain raw and will shrink quickly. I would sit with my elbows bent and my knees

bent, watch a movie for two hours, only to find I could no longer straighten my elbows or knees because the skin would shrink so quickly. It was difficult and painful to stretch the skin back so I could move. That period of my treatment was very depressing.

I'd imagined I was through the most challenging part only to see that what was happening was much worse. It wasn't clear how enormous the struggle would be. With the initial burns I knew it was about transplants and getting the skin to cover the burns again and I could see the progression and see the open wounds being closed. I could see the transplants succeeding. All of that was visible. That's still with me. The scars are still shrinking, but it's much slower these days. If I sit for two hours it doesn't matter, but I still need to stretch them.

I: Did you ever feel like giving up, though you obviously didn't?

DA: When my scars started to shrink about a year into my time in the hospital, and they were fighting against my body, my belief was that it was just not worth it. If I knew in the beginning that all this was involved, I'm not sure I could have, or would have, gone through it. I thought if it happened again to someone, to myself, or anyone I loved, I would not recommend they go forward with the entire process; I think terminating life is a better deal. The benefit is not worth the pain. Unknowingly, I had got through not the majority but a huge part of the pain and I didn't quit. An analogy might be: suppose you are running a marathon and come to believe you are very close to the finish line and they tell you it is only a third of the way. If you'd known how you'd feel with a third to go, you might not have started; but now you've endured so much agony, to quit would disown the two thirds you already ran.

> "Everybody's path of interest is driven to a large degree by his or her own personal experiences."

I: When you crossed this road and realized that the pain wasn't going to be over soon, how did you come to terms with it?

DA: I didn't really come to terms with it. Part of it is just not knowing what's going on. There's a belief that people adjust very quickly to things -- which isn't true. There's also the fact that as human beings we adapt; so even if you believe you won't be able to handle something, you can end up adjusting to it. It's a substantial event of my life and there are many unique things about it. For one thing it makes me think differently about less intense experiences –that because I had such an intense experience I was able to see things with more clarity than others, perhaps. I question things a lot and wonder about behavior, ask a lot of questions. Everybody's path of interest is driven to a large degree by his or her own personal experiences.

I: I think it was Karen Armstrong who said it was a good thing human be-

ings can adapt to anything. So you agree?

DA: I touch on this in my book, *The Upside of Irrationality*, where I describe the things I believe we cannot adapt to. Take pain, we can get used some aspects of it under circumstance where we're able to predict it and can say to ourselves that we've taken worse and it wont kill us. In contrast, in experiments administering electrical shocks -- people don't adapt. In fact, it's the reverse, they become increasing distressed, particularly where the shock is unpredictable -- when you don't know it's coming, you get very helpless. People also can't get used to being socially unconnected. That we have a tremendous ability to adapt is clear, but I don't think we exactly understand the limitations of adaptation.

I: Can you describe the ways you adapted? You spoke about how in the jumpsuit, even though the scars were invisible you still had to figure out what that meant in terms of the social hierarchy. Now your scars are visible. How does that issue play out for you?

DA: I think about how people look at me, will they shake my hands or not, and how people usually assume that if you look different you're also less intelligent. I just had this experience on Friday, when some contractors came to my house to talk to us about doing various changes and they treated me like an idiot.

People expect some sort of correlation between how people look and their intelligence. Because people's faces are basically symmetrical, we tend to look at symmetry in judging beauty. One time we were working with a contractor and it was a frustrating experience because due to my looks, they treated me like I didn't understand what they were saying. It's hard to be taken like this and this isn't the first time.

As an Undergrad, because I'd wear the jumpsuit and I couldn't participate in any of the activities because I looked different, I did compensate by participating more in class and making sure people realized I wasn't stupid. It was the first time I discovered that I actually enjoyed studying and participating in class. Part of it was the need to show people the big part of me that stayed the same, that it wasn't just physical.

I: Given that we face doubt daily - self doubt and in general, is that why we're irrational when making decisions? How can we begin to make better decisions for ourselves?

DA: We can at least make better decisions even if they're not the perfectly right ones. That's one fact. I'm very optimistic about making better decisions. We can make better decisions financially. We can, in principal, regulate the banks so that we're not facing terrible decisions. There's ways to make information systems that would get people to make better decisions. I don't think that we can just leave people alone and have it happen magically. Decisions are tough for us. If we're left to make the decision on our own accord, we would fail continuously. Think about eating. If everyday when you come home, I arrange for you a beautiful buffet with a lot of tempting foods in tremendous quantity, you would fail day after day. There's no question about it. But at the same time, I can help you create a different environment that would not allow you to be tempted in the same way that would not allow you to fail in the same way. If we leave people to their own accord and leave them the decision every time, we would fail repeatedly. That's the bad news. The good news is that we don't have to be helpless. We can try to fight these tendencies. I think we can do things in the environment to help people make better decisions. The second thing you asked was whether people can ever think that they're making the right decisions. That's tough because we see other people making decisions, we see ourselves making decisions and we continually compare ourselves to other people. We worry that our decisions aren't good enough and it affects our abilities so that we end up making even worse decisions.

I: Does your research provide clues about how to conceptualize better decision-making?

DA: There's one interesting trick, which is that commitment to a particular path actually helps convince us that this is the right decision. Think about arranged marriage. When you're in an arranged marriage, your parents pick whom you marry, and it's pretty much, "This is it and there's no way out." You just have to make sense out of it. I'm not saying that arranged marriages are great, but the same holds true for non-arranged mar-

> **"You should try to connect the negative thing to something positive so that you're not avoiding the thing but the positive pairing makes you actually want it to happen."**

riages as well. There's one study that shows that if you look at arranged marriages in India and you look at love marriages in India, the love marriages start happier and the arranged marriages start out less happy, but then both marriages cross in year three. The idea is that if you have to live in a certain way, then you start making yourself happy with this reality, adapt basically. There's a beautiful paper by Jane Hibberts and Dan Gilbert in which they look at this principle in more detail. They get people to develop pictures and say, "Hey, why don't you pick the pictures you like most and we'll make a big copy of it for you so that you can hang it in your room as a poster. Half of the people are told they can change their decision later, while the other half are told they can't change their minds. Guess who's happier with their decision two weeks later? The people who couldn't change their mind. This also resonates with dating. If you're with someone but keep looking over your shoulder thinking, "Whom else could I have been with?" it's a recipe for a low level of happiness.

I: Can we overcome fear by associating it with another experience? You coupled taking your medical shots with watching movies and showed how it helped you survive the miserable process because you looked forward to your movie watching...

DA: It's very important to break things into small components and connect rewards to it and be more thoughtful and cognitive. Fear inherently makes the experience worse. Gregory Burns from Emory University describes putting people into an MRI to observe brain activity. He gives them electrical shocks and tells them when they're going to get the electrical shock and how big it's going to be. Then he measures their brain activity. He found that the brain activation that

comes just before the shock, when people dread it, is indistinguishable from what the brain tells them while they're actually having the shock.

I: So the anticipation is the pain essentially?

DA: Yes, so mainly the anticipation we usually call dread is adding to the experience. Now think about two experiences, one in which you both dread it and you experience it, and another in which you don't dread you just experience. Dread is actually much worse; It's almost like twice the pain.

I: How can people override that initial feeling and stop the dread?

DA: I don't have a medical solution for this, but for me movies are a great distraction. You just don't think about the negative thing. If you keep thinking about it, it gets worse. You also should try to connect the negative thing to something positive, so that you're not avoiding the thing but the positive pairing makes you actually want it to happen. When you know you can suffer through something and nothing truly bad will happen, you're not as worried anymore. I had a couple of students who were marathon runners and they told me it is a psychological war -- the struggle between continuing on and stopping. It's the knowledge that it is possible, that the body wants to give up, but they know that they can go past this point, that makes it possible.

DAN ARIELY

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“We are what we repeatedly do.
Excellence, then, is not an act but a habit.”

Aristotle