

Virtual Campfire S7 Ep327

Transcript

Ann Brennan [00:00:02 - 00:00:19]

Gosh, you know, if you go back to the depression, when you're, when you're in the middle of it, it seems like there's absolutely no hope. If you can hold on and ask for help, and it seems really hard to admit that you need help, it seems really hard, but as soon as you do, there is some relief.

Lane Gardner [00:00:21 - 00:00:30]

I've discovered in my own journey, both as an artist and as somebody who helps other people with creativity, is that We often have to start at the center of our bodies.

April Rinne [00:00:32 - 00:00:42]

This sense of borrowed time. Yes, we have all of these rights once we exist, but the fact of our existence is such a miracle and such a stroke of magic and good luck.

Tony Martignetti [00:00:43 - 00:01:36]

Sometimes the deepest darkness becomes the place where hope quietly begins, not because the pain disappears, but because we begin discovering That we don't have to face it alone. Around every campfire, stories have shaped who we've become. They remind us we're not alone. They challenge the way we think, and sometimes they change the direction of our lives. Welcome to this special series of the Virtual Campfire. I'm Tony Martinetti. Together, we'll explore powerful conversations inspired by the themes of Campfire Lessons for Leaders, uncovering the moments of transformation, courage, and growth that shape who we are and who we become. The fire is lit.

Tony Martignetti [00:01:37 - 00:02:20]

Let's gather where stories spark transformation. Some chapters of our lives begin with excitement. Others begin with loss. Sometimes the moments that change us forever aren't the ones we choose. They're the ones life places in front of us. But even in our darkest seasons, there's this possibility of healing. Not all at once, not without struggle, but one courageous step at a time. Today, we'll hear 3 remarkable stories of people who discovered that hope isn't something we simply find.

Tony Martignetti [00:02:20 - 00:02:49]

Sometimes it's something we build. Our first story reminds us that strength isn't always what it appears to be. Anne Brennan was known by everyone around her as the strong one, an Ironman athlete, a successful entrepreneur, someone people leaned on. But when her family entered one of the darkest seasons imaginable, she discovered that even the strongest among us sometimes need someone to help carry the weight. Here's Anne.

Ann Brennan [00:02:51 - 00:03:34]

So, Tony, one thing I do a lot, I do a talk, I speak to people about checking on your strong friends, right? You have to check on your strong friends. But when I give this talk, I say you might be your strong friend. And I say this Because I have a story that started in 2012. I had been for 2 years training for Ironman. I had completed it in October of 2012 and did way better than I ever expected to do. And people had followed my journey on Facebook and Instagram and YouTube and all over the place because I had a podcast and a blog about running. So, I had this group of people who called me Iron Ann. In the middle of all of this, I finished that Ironman in October.

Ann Brennan [00:03:34 - 00:04:15]

I knew something was not right with my child, my second son, Ethan. And by March, my son had ended up in the hospital because he was self-harming and he was suicidal and it was terrifying. So that was the beginning of our— me going from Ironman to psych ward. And that's— it wasn't Ethan's psych ward, it was mine. By July of 2013, I had lost all hope for Ethan. I had started planning for what was going to happen when one of his suicide attempts worked. I had no idea how I would survive, and I didn't want to survive without him. And I didn't want to have that moment of actually finding him dead.

Ann Brennan [00:04:15 - 00:04:34]

So it was a horrible thing I was going through. I was sleeping outside his room. I wasn't eating. I wasn't sleeping. I wasn't taking care of myself. And I just got to a point where finally I had to call somebody. And it only happened because I was going to— we live in Annapolis, Maryland. We lived in Annapolis, Maryland, and I was heading to the Bay Bridge.

Ann Brennan [00:04:34 - 00:05:00]

And I knew in my head, I'm heading to the Bay Bridge because I'm going to jump off it today. And I had a moment where I thought, wait a second, that's not okay. What's wrong? Something's wrong. And I called a local emergency psychiatric unit and I said, I, I Really, I think I need help. Either that, or I'm gonna go jump off the Bay Bridge. And they said, well, why don't you come in? And that was, that was the beginning of, crazily, that was the beginning of something really beautiful.

Tony Martignetti [00:05:01 - 00:05:18]

One of the greatest misconceptions about resilience is that resilient people never struggle. Anne's story reminds us of something very different. Sometimes resilience isn't found in holding everything together, Sometimes it's found in admitting that we simply can't do it alone.

Ann Brennan [00:05:19 - 00:05:51]

To be in a place like that, yeah, it's, it's very, it's, it's unbelievably dark. And it was a, a big surprise for me cuz I was my strong friend, right? I was everybody's strong friend. This is, people knew me as the person who they could talk to. People were calling me Iron Anne. So actually what happened after I got out of the psych ward, I was on, in the psych, on the

psych ward for about a week when I got out. I wrote an article because I had a blog and I wrote a blog post called Psych Ward Annie. And my husband was furious with me. He was like, I cannot believe you did this.

Ann Brennan [00:05:51 - 00:06:20]

Why would you put yourself out there this way? This is our private information. And we never argue. We've been married almost 30 years and we never argue. We, you know, even through everything that was going on with Ethan, we never argued. We were always there for each other. But this moment, he was so mad at me. And I'm saying to him at the time, Blaze, people are calling me Iron Anne, and I just spent a week trying to pull myself back up because I wanted to die. Like, I can't do that.

Ann Brennan [00:06:20 - 00:07:02]

It's not fair to people who are out there. It's not fair for them to think of me as this really strong person when that's probably what almost killed me is being the really strong person, not admitting that I was having a hard time, not telling people that I don't know how to deal with these emotions that I'm having for my child, this fear that I'm dealing with. But we're doing this argument, we're really arguing. And I had my phone in my hand and it buzzed at me and I looked down and there was a comment from my blog. And it said, it was from a 15-year-old boy and he said, I was gonna kill myself tonight, but I called my mom and she's gonna come help me. And that moment my husband said, so what else can we do? How else do we share this? And everything changed for us. Yeah.

Tony Martignetti [00:07:03 - 00:07:28]

I just want to take a moment because I think that's so profound. And knowing that just something, anything that you can do to impact someone's life in a positive way gives you hope that, you know, because of the strength you've had in the past and you've exhibited in the past, could be the thing that rises up from that moment of darkness and brings you out into the light. And allows you to kind of rise up from that moment.

Ann Brennan [00:07:29 - 00:08:08]

Tony, there's so much shame around it, right? And for the longest time, I felt a lot of shame that I let myself get to this place. And when I was in the hospital, my husband came to visit and he said, he said, what happened? And I said, well, I told you I was struggling. And he says, yes, you said I was struggling. You didn't say I'm suicidal. There's a big difference between these two. And, and there's all the shame that's around it. So that moment of that young man saying, I'm going to get help, took a lot of that shame away because I went, wait a second, that was strong because I could see how strong he was. That was strong for him to say to his mom, I was going to kill myself tonight, but I need help, which meant if it was strong for him, I had to be strong as well.

Ann Brennan [00:08:09 - 00:08:16]

Right. So I think it was, it was really an eye-opener for me. And I think for our entire family. Yeah.

Tony Martignetti [00:08:16 - 00:08:57]

I mean, it's, it's really amazing to hear that because it's like when you see strength in these people, it's beautiful to see that even at the darkest moments, you can come up from that moment and say, okay, this is possible. This is possible to do something else. I keep on thinking of the Viktor Frankl experience of, you know, being in the concentration camps and still seeing a possibility and seeing a light even in the darkest of times in that, in that moment. And this is so such a dark period to be able to take that and turn it into something positive, which is what you have done. And that's what I'm looking forward to hearing more about. Where you've taken this from that moment.

Ann Brennan [00:08:58 - 00:09:14]

Right. Well, so let me tell you something too. You just said what a dark moment it is. It's a dark moment, but it's a moment of absolutely no, no hope. And that's, that's why people go, that's why they die. People say, I don't understand why somebody would die by suicide because they've lost all hope.

Tony Martignetti [00:09:15 - 00:09:29]

Hope doesn't always arrive as a breakthrough. Sometimes hope arrives as a single conversation. A phone call, someone willing to listen. And for Anne, asking for help became the first step towards helping thousands of others.

Ann Brennan [00:09:30 - 00:10:05]

For me, I'd lost all hope. Ethan was going to die. In my mind, he was going to die, which meant my life had to end because I could not live without him. That was, that was where I was. Whether it made sense or not, whether this was where we were or not, it's where I was. So I want people to remember that if you're feeling like there is no hope, it's really definitely time to go ask for help. I think that's, that's something that's really important to remember. What we did with it though is so great because it was, and actually, Tony, you'll laugh at me because if you go back into my life, my whole life has been about long distance sports.

Ann Brennan [00:10:05 - 00:10:38]

It's always been that everything I've ever done has been about doing long distance. So the day we took Ethan to the hospital the first time, we took him to Shepherd Pratt up in Baltimore and I was coming home. And there was an ad on the radio and it came on and it said, come walk the Out of the Darkness Walk. And I thought, I'm going to do that. I'm going to do that. And I'm going to raise money for suicide prevention. That's what I'm going to do. And so I went, you know, I went back to the hospital the next day and I said to Ethan, hey, I'm going to do this Out of the Darkness Walk.

Ann Brennan [00:10:38 - 00:11:06]

Do you want to do it with me? What a crazy thing for me to ask my child who is sitting there in a psych ward while we're, while I'm asking it. And he was like, no, I, no, I really don't. And I was like, okay, that's fine. I'm going to do this walk. And so I raised about, I think,

\$1,400 because that's what I had to raise. I had to raise \$1,400 to do this walk. And then about a week beforehand, Ethan said to me, hey, I want to do the walk with you. And I thought, oh no, I've got to raise money for him.

Ann Brennan [00:11:07 - 00:11:41]

We ended up raising another \$2,400 with his help. So we raised, you know, what is that? \$3,800 for that first walk. And then because we're long-distance athletes, we looked at it and we were like, this This overnight thing was just too easy. Why don't we do something more challenging? So for the— I know. So the next 2 years, we decided that we would walk through the woods. We were in on the Greater Allegheny Passage. And unless you're a, what is that, a ranger? We were on the Greater Allegheny Passage if you're a ranger, because I think it's closed at night. So we wouldn't have done that.

Ann Brennan [00:11:42 - 00:12:13]

But we walked for 24 hours. straight for 2 years in a row and raised money for suicide prevention. And as we did this, each of these walks we would do, we would have these talks about why we were doing it. And the biggest reason was to say, you're not alone. Ethan would say to me when he first got sick, he'd say, I'd say, sweetie, you know that you're at a school where people are dying by suicide on a regular basis. So you're not alone in this. And he says, no, I am. Nobody feels this way.

Ann Brennan [00:12:13 - 00:12:37]

Nobody understands it. And I kept saying, but you're not. And look at the people around you. And even when we took him to Shepherd Pratt the first time, he was signing in and they said to him, where do you go to high school? And he says, I go to Sephora Park. And he, they go, oh, you go to Suicide High. It was a horrible thing to say. But even hearing that, he couldn't hear that he wasn't alone. So on these walks, we talked about it.

Ann Brennan [00:12:37 - 00:13:05]

How do we make people see see that they're not alone? How do we do this? Because these walks are great. We're raising tens of thousands of dollars, but we're not getting the message out there the way we want. And so we came up with this great idea for Burgers and Bands for Suicide Prevention. And the idea was born out of the fact that we have a local tap house. So it's the Vernal Park Tap House. And they have this great big backyard where you can have bands. And I thought, well, I love this place and they have great burgers. So we'll do something.

Ann Brennan [00:13:05 - 00:13:30]

We'll call it Burgers and Bands. And we'll do a little fundraiser. So the first year we did it, we raised \$8,000. We thought, well, that's really cool. And the best part was about 3 weeks later, we got a call from a mom who said, my son came to me afterwards and said, Ms. Ann said I can ask for help. Can you help me? And we were like, that was so great that he asked for help and he's getting help. And so we're like, we're doing something good.

Ann Brennan [00:13:30 - 00:13:42]

The next year we raised, I think, \$45,000. And then last year we raised about \$150,000. So this year we've raised hardly anything because of COVID but we'll, we'll come back. We'll come back.

Tony Martignetti [00:13:42 - 00:13:42]

Yeah.

Tony Martignetti [00:13:43 - 00:14:21]

I mean, these are strange times for sure, but wow, what an amazing last year. That's remarkable. And, you know, one of the key takeaways that I'm hearing so far is this element of like, you are not alone. And, and that's been ringing true through all the statistics that we hear about. There's so many people suffering in silence. And people just need to hear the message that, you know, you're not alone. There's so many people who are struggling, maybe even more so right now with the element of just being, you know, kind of cordoned off into sheltering in place and what have you. And that definitely amplifies the challenges people have with being lonely.

Ann Brennan [00:14:22 - 00:14:42]

Right. Well, and if you want to know whether your story matters, I will tell you this. When we talk about this, every time we talk about it. And, and actually, probably I have a really good story about it. I was at a— I was picking my son up from CCD. So we're Catholic. We were at, uh, CCD. He was at CCD and I was sitting outside in the lobby on a little couch and I was knitting and I was knitting hats.

Ann Brennan [00:14:43 - 00:15:17]

This is another way I raised money. So I was knitting these hats for suicide prevention and somebody came up to me. The first lady came up to me and she said, so what are you doing? And I said, oh, I'm knitting a hat and I sell them and I raise money for suicide And she says, oh, my grandson's in the hospital right now for suicide ideation. And I says, oh my gosh. So we talked a little bit and then she left and I sat there, I kept knitting and another woman came up and she says, oh, my son, he's 40 years old. He's just gotten out of the hospital and he had, he's, he attempted suicide. He's just gotten out of the hospital. And I says, oh my gosh, you know, I'm so sorry.

Ann Brennan [00:15:17 - 00:15:58]

And we talked for a bit. And then a third person sat down and he was a young man and he said, yeah, I just got out of the hospital. for depression. And we thought, my gosh, you know, if you share the story, then that person will share it too. If you say, this is what I'm doing, this is what I care about, then people do. And that, so every time I speak, somebody comes to me and says, every single time without, without exception, somebody comes to me and says, I think I really need help. So it's worth sharing. When you're in the middle of it, it seems like there's absolutely no hope.

Ann Brennan [00:15:58 - 00:16:35]

If you can hold on and ask for help, and it seems really hard to admit that you need help, it seems really hard. But as soon as you do, there is some relief. As soon as you say, I can't do all of this, I need somebody to hold me up right now. And especially if you're a strong person, that is a really hard thing to do. A great example, Tony. I was riding down— my husband and I went on a ride for a 120-mile bike ride, and about 100 miles in, I ran out of Gatorade. And I said, when we get to— there's a 7-Eleven a few miles up the road. When we get there, I want to stop and get some more Gatorade.

Ann Brennan [00:16:35 - 00:17:13]

And he says, I have some extra. And I'm like, no, no, I'll wait. So that's the kind of person I am. I don't take help in general, but To ask for help for something this big seemed impossible, but I'm so grateful I did. I'm so grateful that it just pulled me out enough, and that's all you need is just enough for you to go, okay, okay, wait, I'm actually strong. I can actually do this, but I have to take care of me. So gosh, there's so many messages. So put on your own oxygen mask first because the people around you aren't going to do any— you're not going to be able to do them any good if you don't take care of yourself.

Ann Brennan [00:17:13 - 00:17:23]

You are enough. It's okay to ask for help. You are. It's really okay. And more important than anything, you're not alone. Oh, Tony, can I share one more thing?

Tony Martignetti [00:17:24 - 00:17:25]

Yes, absolutely.

Ann Brennan [00:17:25 - 00:17:36]

So I have a story that is— when I say you're not alone, people don't always believe me. And I will often say to them, look at the person next to you and share, share how you're feeling.

Tony Martignetti [00:17:39 - 00:18:19]

Anne's story reminds us that healing often begins with one courageous decision: to ask for help. But once we've taken that first step, another question emerges: how do we begin to make sense of what we've lived through? For some, the answer comes through conversation. For others, it comes through creativity. Our next guest discovered that music wasn't simply an art form; it became a pathway to healing. And in helping others find their creative voice, she discovered something even more powerful. Sometimes our greatest purpose grows out of our deepest pain. Here's Layne Gardner.

Lane Gardner [00:18:20 - 00:19:09]

It started at a very, very early age. You know, I come from a childhood that was really, really difficult and really, really traumatic. And, you know, my mother was a gifted pianist. And my father was a highly decorated Vietnam veteran and he was a medevac pilot actually in Vietnam. And he was running really dangerous rescue missions into the jungles there to save his fellow wounded soldiers. And so, you know, my life sort of started at a time when my father was returning home from Vietnam and he was completely crushed under the

weight of PTSD, as I'm sure you can imagine. And so, My parents, you know, divorced within a year. And at that point, there was really no understanding or support for what our soldiers were going through at that time.

Lane Gardner [00:19:09 - 00:20:18]

So, you know, I kind of had this very, you know, critical moment at such an early age, at age 4, when my parents split. And, you know, we found ourselves back in my grandparents' house when I was very young. And so My mom was really struggling. I don't have a lot of memories of it, but what happened with her was within a year she joined a religious cult and she remarried someone who was, you know, turned out to be a really, really, you know, difficult, traumatic, abusive element in my life. So at such an early age, I kind of had to get really scrappy about how to figure out how to survive, really. Mm-hmm. And because my family, you know, my mother's a pianist, I also had, you know, other generations in my family of self-taught musicians, my grandfather, aunts, uncles. So even though I was in this very, very difficult situation as a young person, I had this sort of lifeline, which was the fact that my family came together regularly for musical jam sessions.

Lane Gardner [00:20:18 - 00:21:16]

And so I really started to understand understand the power of music. And these were self-taught musicians. It was about having fun and connecting and being together, and it sort of transcended all the difficulties that we were experiencing. And so that really stuck with me, this experience that creativity and music could create connection and healing and experience with people that didn't choir, figuring stuff out. It was really kind of beyond words. And so as my life went on, I would say around age 9, I started getting into the local community theater and taking voice lessons and acting lessons. And that ended up actually being my escape from the really, really challenging situations that I was in at home. And that was a safe space.

Lane Gardner [00:21:16 - 00:22:05]

That was a protective space. That was a community where I could really start to discover who I was and what my gifts were and what my talents were. And so I would, you know, do that for the rest of my adolescence, for the rest of my high school years, and went on to become a professional singer-actor. Was my first career, actually, as a young person. and went to conservatory to study music theater and classical voice. And throughout that period of time, I was really comforted by not only the community and the safe space that I was in, but I was also comforted by being in somebody else's stories as an actress, as a singer. I was singing somebody else's songs. I was portraying a character.

Lane Gardner [00:22:06 - 00:23:18]

That was somebody else's story. And that really got me through, actually, a lot of my younger years. It was an escape. It was a safety net, actually. It was a lifeline. And so, you know, that's sort of really those early years of being in the arts is, I think, really what kept me alive, frankly, you know? And the people that I met, the connections that I made, was, you know, a certain kind of person. They weren't all, you know, professional artists, but it

was people who really had a shared humanity, and they had shared experiences that brought them into the arts, that brought them into the world of storytelling, right? And so that shaped me as a young person, and, you know, really sort of, I think, set me up for kind of the next chapter of my life, which became really much about teaching, using this stuff that I was learning, had learned, to young people and to adults. But I would say that, you know, for the most part, that those early age was really formative for me.

Lane Gardner [00:23:18 - 00:23:21]

And, and I would say that the arts kind of saved my life.

Lane Gardner [00:23:23 - 00:23:40]

There's something deeply human about Lane's story. She didn't discover creativity because life was easy. She discovered it because life was difficult. And sometimes that's exactly what art does. It gives us a place to breathe when life feels too heavy for words.

Lane Gardner [00:23:41 - 00:24:44]

Before I graduated from conservatory, I was offered an opportunity to, to create a little afterschool arts program at a local elementary school. And I'd never taught before, and I thought, okay, well, you know, I grew up in the arts and the theater. This can't be so hard. And so I decided to kind of just create a program that was like, how could I help these young people feel better about themselves, right? Because that's kind of the basics of being in the arts, right? And so from there, it kind of took off. And I was probably like 20 years old at the time. And so I just, over the next almost 30 years, I sort of experimented with all kinds of programming, human development arts, human development through the arts, basically. So, you know, whether I was teaching in elementary school, whether I was teaching at a youth center, you know, outside of the time that I was performing in shows or whatever, I was teaching as well. And so that both taught me a lot about myself and also about, like, just human beings.

Lane Gardner [00:24:45 - 00:25:30]

and how extraordinary they are, right? So that was sort of my whole life until I started to realize that I was kind of falling out of love with performing. I had started becoming— I'd started performing as a child. And so I don't know. Every time I would go on an audition, I was just feeling like, ah, I'm just not loving this anymore. And so fast forward, I am having a beautiful baby boy in 2004. And I had this incredibly life-changing experience with that where, as a new mom, I was suddenly hit with all kinds of traumatic experiences. I was having panic attacks. I was having enormous postpartum depression.

Lane Gardner [00:25:30 - 00:26:05]

I was having this irrational fear of leaving him even for a couple of minutes. And I was like, what the heck is going on here? And it took me a while to sort of figure out what was going on. But because of my own childhood, being raised in such a traumatic environment, becoming a mom really put me square in some very, very old childhood trauma. And so

what that forced me to do is I realized I was really in a crisis moment. I was a young mom, I had an infant, and I, I had to really figure out how to get it together.

Tony Martignetti [00:26:06 - 00:26:06]

Yeah.

Lane Gardner [00:26:06 - 00:26:46]

And so I was like, let me go to the one thing that I know how to do, which is music. And what I found by doing that was I realized that I could no longer tell other people's stories by being a character in a musical. I actually needed to start to dive into my own stories. And it's interesting because I realize, looking back now, that for the first 15 years as a teacher, I wanted nothing to do with my own stories. I was really, really content to help other people uncover their own journeys. And, you know, I was sort of like keeping my own self.

Lane Gardner [00:26:46 - 00:26:47]

Yes, it's safety.

Lane Gardner [00:26:47 - 00:28:06]

I was protecting myself. And so when my own stories came up to really bite me in the butt, I was like, well, isn't that just how it goes? You know, you teach what you have to learn yourself, right? And so I delved into songwriting, and I had never had any experience really writing songs. I mean, I had written stuff in the past, but not as a songwriter. And so what I found was that the elements of music were a real safe container for me to learn how to tell my own stories without getting completely crushed under the weight of the trauma. It was like, a safety, like a safe passage, right? If I could turn my anger into a driving rhythm that expressed my anger without actually having to like get really triggered by it, that was a really powerful transformation. If I could write lyrics that expressed my rage or my terror in a creative way, there was a, there was a safe passage there, I guess is what I'm trying to say. And I found that There was an incredible healing process for me in writing these songs, and it all just sort of started pouring out and I couldn't stop. It just all was ready to come tumbling out.

Lane Gardner [00:28:08 - 00:28:25]

What strikes me most about Lane's journey is that healing didn't come from leaving the past behind. It came from finally facing it, not alone, but through creativity. Sometimes the very thing we've used to escape our lives becomes the thing that helps us understand them.

Lane Gardner [00:28:26 - 00:28:59]

So I had this really amazing experience in 2018, actually. My husband Pete and I were asked to work with students of Marjory Stoneman Douglas High School in Parkland, Florida, just a few months after the horrific mass shooting there. And we brought this process that I had sort of been developing, you know, us for a really long time. And so we brought this sort of therapeutic songwriting, collaborative songwriting process to that moment in time.

Tony Martignetti [00:28:59 - 00:29:00]

Mm-hmm.

Lane Gardner [00:29:00 - 00:29:19]

And we were working with a licensed music therapist, collaborating with her as well in this process. And it was a very short process, but it really changed my life. And I know that it changed the lives of the young people that we were working with who had been through this horrific tragedy. Mm-hmm.

Lane Gardner [00:29:23 - 00:30:50]

And so over the course of these days where we helped them to tell their story in a creative way, in a shared way, right? They all had their own experience of something that they lived through together. And what happened was they created not only this incredibly powerful work of art, they transformed their trauma into something that was so beautiful that not only helped them, but when they shared that song with the other students in their school, there was this collective healing that happened as well. And that changed me forever. And I thought, well, this is really it, isn't it? Like, the individual and the collective process here by not only sharing your own individual experience, but knowing that you're sharing your individual experience as a part of a collective experience. And the healing happens on these 2 big levels. And I just, I was, you know, that's when I set out to start this nonprofit Thread, which we was, is designed to expand the circles of the way this work can help people. And as you know, trauma is so pervasive, you know, where you don't have to live in a, you know, go through a mass shooting, you know, to have trauma.

Lane Gardner [00:30:50 - 00:30:53]

I mean, trauma is in all of us, right?

Lane Gardner [00:30:53 - 00:31:38]

Whether it's, you know, an experience that you had as a young person being bullied, or whether it's an inequality that you're dealing with because of your skin color, because of who you love, Or, you know, it doesn't matter what these experiences are. We all have them and we all share them with a group of people and who have a similar experience as us, right? And so the arts can do that. I believe the arts can deliver that kind of individual and collective healing that creates a safe space and creates connection between our shared stories. And we can do it in a safe container, which is the art form itself, right?

Lane Gardner [00:31:38 - 00:31:38]

Yeah.

Lane Gardner [00:31:38 - 00:32:38]

Which is this supportive thing. And so I think we're at the point right now where we're just getting started with what we can actually do with this. And I believe with all of my heart that this is one of the innovations that we need in mental health right now. one of the

innovations that we need to help us heal from not only our, you know, long-term trauma that we all have in our own way, but we're in this moment, this collective crisis moment with COVID right now that we are being impacted by on a daily basis. And we need some innovative ideas and innovative solutions Yeah. You know, and mental health is something that people are more willing to talk about now. They're— because they're getting crushed by their own mental health, and they need solutions. They need help.

Lane Gardner [00:32:38 - 00:33:00]

And, you know, talk therapy is not for everybody. You know, support groups are not for everybody. You know, but if we can have something that is creative and fun and cathartic and collaborative, It is an alternative to helping ourselves not only feel better, but create something beautiful in the process. You know?

Lane Gardner [00:33:02 - 00:34:24]

Where are you on your path as a leader? Are you ready to find out? Take my leadership journey assessment to get started. I want you to become the leader you're meant to be so you can have the impact you're meant to have. Go to inspiredpurposecoach.com and click on the button at the top of the page to There's a couple things I want to react to because I just, you know, what you're describing is just so powerful. But there's number one, the thought of something beautiful. Beautiful is in the eye of the beholder, right? And there's an element of like, you know, the perfectionists and a lot of these people would say like, well, I'm not an artist, I can't do this. And if it's not perfect and, you know, I don't want people to see that, but it's not about that. It's beautiful just because of what it gets, what gets created, what gets transformed into, you know, the healing that happens through this process. And then I guess the second part of this for me was to just say that, like, what's beautiful is this, the process of creating it, but also the thing that gets created, whether it's a piece of music or a piece of art, that is the reminder of this Of what was released from this collective, which I think is also something that helps people to remember, you don't leave your past behind, you include it and then you transcend it.

Lane Gardner [00:34:25 - 00:35:02]

That's exactly right. And I definitely wanna respond to the point that you're making about people who feel that they're not an artist and they're not creative. And, you know, I couldn't possibly do that because that is not my jam, right? This work is designed for exactly those people, you know? And I wanna share, you know, my experiences over the years of doing this work is that everybody who is a part of this collective process, what they end up doing is tending to find their comfort zone in this creative process. So for example, some people find the thought of singing terrifying, right?

Lane Gardner [00:35:03 - 00:35:26]

But they might be really, really drawn to this idea of, I can write some lyrics, or I actually really feel like I can create a rhythm that I hear that would be expressing my feelings, my anger, my joy, my whatever. I can make a rhythm. And I, I'm, I'm attracted to these, you know, these congas or these shakers or the—

Lane Gardner [00:35:27 - 00:36:22]

And so each person tends to find. And that's the way I've designed the work, is that you open up the door for everybody to find the thing that they want to use as their voice, right? And sometimes that's singing, sometimes that's writing, sometimes that's playing an instrument, you know. And so each person then is able to contribute their story to the collective fabric of the song. And that is The— that is the structure of the song, right? These elements, we take the participants through these exercises that allow them to learn how to transform emotion into a rhythm or an emotion into a melody or an emotion into a sound. And so that is the base of our project, of our art. And so everybody can listen to that song and be like, that's my thing.

Lane Gardner [00:36:23 - 00:36:59]

That's, that was my experience. I've got that rhythm in there and I, and I can hold onto that and I can, that's me. That's my experience. That's my collect— my, my contribution to this whole. And that's what makes it transformative for each person that goes through the process is that everybody has skin in the game. And it's, and it's not about being an artist, it's about learning how to transform your feeling or your part of your story into something that's not necessarily words, you know, or maybe it is, right? But whatever you come up with is.

Lane Gardner [00:37:00 - 00:37:41]

And then the other part of your, of your question or your observation that I wanna acknowledge also is there's, you know, the process is twofold. It really is. It's the first part is this therapeutic, collaborative, creative process. Where the participants have the opportunity to share their stories, to find the common, and that becomes what the song is about. And through that process, they're able to transform their difficult experiences into something amazing and beautiful. The second part of it is that the songs are there for them, like you said, to be reminded of their journey, of their courage, of their strength.

Lane Gardner [00:37:42 - 00:38:36]

of everything that they are bringing to the table. And they can be reminded of that if they're having a hard day. Let me just listen to that thing that reminds me that I'm OK, right? So that's one piece. The other piece is that the songs are supposed to be shared to cultivate conversation about mental health, to help destigmatize the difficult things that we all are going through. You know, our— I think a lot of our human nature is to sweep stuff that's hard under the rug, right? And we don't want to, you know, we don't want to look at it. So like, if you can listen to a song and that can be an easy way to cultivate a conversation about something that we can, you know, address that's maybe difficult in a safe and supportive way, then art is doing its job. In a really profound way as well.

Lane Gardner [00:38:37 - 00:39:30]

Yeah, this topic has been so amazing to hear. And, you know, thinking about how like, it's comforting to get these topics out there for people to hear and say like, don't suppress these feelings, don't suppress yourself, express yourself, allow yourself to get out there. And, you know, know that this is the way for us to get back connected is to find ways to do these types of activities together, maybe create something together. It's not just for the people who, you know, will diagnose themselves as having some, you know, challenges mentally, but also everyone, everyone needs some connection. And I think through a medium of art and creativity, this is how we can come back together in a powerful way and memorialize the challenge we've collectively gone through. So this is for everyone. And some, to some extent.

Lane Gardner [00:39:30 - 00:40:13]

I agree. And I think it's a real moment in history where we need something, you know. I think one of the things that I'm feeling for myself, as well as for, you know, just people in my circles that I'm talking to, is that we really want things to kind of just go back to normal, right? Like, wouldn't we just, wouldn't that just be awesome? Like, let's just put it all behind us. go right back to where we were. Everything's great. However, that's obviously not reality, right? And I think one of the things that we're all realizing is that I think our instincts are to not want to acknowledge what we've been through and what we continue to go through. We don't want to touch stuff with a 10-foot pole. We're tired of it.

Lane Gardner [00:40:13 - 00:40:19]

And it's scary and it's hard. And it's— nobody's excited to talk about trauma.

Lane Gardner [00:40:20 - 00:41:38]

Who wants to do that? It's the last thing that anybody wants to have to lift the lid on, right? But I think what's happening is it's becoming intolerable for us in certain ways. It's piling up to the point where even if we want to avoid it, even if we want to sweep it under the rug, it's showing up in elevated levels of anxiety or elevated levels of depression. If you look at the data that's coming out of the CDC right now, the increase of mental health symptoms is really happening, and it continues to grow. And I think that the medical professionals are also worried that it's going to keep getting larger and larger, especially as the pandemic eventually subsides and we have to kind of sit in the aftermath. We really are going to need and continue to need now You know, to realize that as much as we really, really wanna just, you know, go back to the way we were, we, we have some individual and collective healing that we need to do in order to move forward. And I think that's why this work, Threads work, can really, really serve a lot of purposes right now because we're so reluctant to want to deal with hard stuff.

Lane Gardner [00:41:39 - 00:42:13]

If we could do it in a way that's creative and collaborative and helpful, it's, it's a way forward. You know, it's a bit of a third road between digging up all of your difficult stuff versus completely, you know, and feeling like triggered by it all versus, you know, like literally having to, you know, suffer in silence all the symptoms that you're living with and

not get any support. I think it's a middle ground of. Of getting the support, getting the connection, but also having something creative that doesn't make it as scary.

Lane Gardner [00:42:14 - 00:42:48]

And it makes it more, more, I don't know, compelling perhaps, and safe and supportive. And I think, you know, I think that's where we're at right now. We, we don't wanna deal with it, but we're gonna have to, and we need some new ideas. One of the main things that I have come to realize, and I think that this is something that I'm learning is also typical of people who have had early trauma, is that I have always sort of believed that I've had to sort of figure all this out on my own.

Lane Gardner [00:42:50 - 00:43:40]

And that I, and these are survival mechanisms, right? I had to do that as a child. I had to sort of figure out really independent ways of staying alive. And so I've carried that, unfortunately, into my adult life. And so one of the biggest lessons that I have learned and continue to learn every day is that I need connection. I need support. I, as much as I am so passionate about bringing this kind of help to others, it is, you're only as strong as the circles that you are in, right? Yeah. You know, and So I've had to be more self-compassionate. I've had to sort of remove that sort of like superhuman strength, you know, expectation of myself.

Lane Gardner [00:43:40 - 00:44:27]

And that has really helped me. It's helped me so much. It's a bit of a weird shift in my lens, but it's made me feel so much more connected to myself and to other people in my life. And it's also made me realize that I need people as much as they need me, and when we all are in this together. So I would say that's one of my biggest takeaways from my entire journey, you know, 48 years of my life, is that we are all here together and we all bring our unique gifts and talents to the table, and we all need each other's expertise. We all need each other's wheelhouse. wheelhouse to each other, I really do think that we have the ability to create a very different experience as human beings. So that's a huge piece for me.

Lane Gardner [00:44:27 - 00:44:51]

And I guess I would say that the other thing is that going back to this sort of perfectionism thing that you were talking about earlier about people feeling like they can't be creative or they can't be artistic because it's not going to be perfect, I have that perfectionism too. I was joking with somebody the other day, like, I've only recently realized that I don't have to have the dishes all washed before I go to bed every night.

Lane Gardner [00:44:52 - 00:44:55]

Like, I have this crazy perfectionism and, and it's served me well.

April Rinne [00:44:56 - 00:44:56]

Obvi—

Lane Gardner [00:44:56 - 00:45:15]

it, in a lot of ways, it's pushed me to create and do a lot of things that I've needed that kind of grit and, you know, detail for. But it has exhausted me and it has drained me and it has made me, it's cost me a lot of my ease and joy in life.

Lane Gardner [00:45:16 - 00:45:58]

And I, that's the other thing that I wanted to express for all of my fellow perfectionists out there is perfectionism costs too much, you know, and life, it is, it should be, we can strive for it to be a much greater mix of unfinished business, you know, and imperfection. And, you know, the dishes should stay in the sink, you know, like to just put a little metaphor on it, you know, life is too short and the perfectionism is so, it's just too tiring. And it doesn't really, I think in the end, going back to, you know, our initial topic is like, what is in your heart? What is in your soul?

Lane Gardner [00:46:00 - 00:46:31]

You know, that is perfect regardless of how hard you work at it. You know, and to kind of have that growing self, I don't know, love to say I'm perfect just inside of here, inside of me, inside of my heart and soul. And I don't have to make it all just so out, out in the world because aligning yourself with your own gifts and talents and authenticity is the perfection that Brings joy.

Tony Martignetti [00:46:33 - 00:47:09]

Lane reminds us that healing often begins when we finally find the courage to tell our own story. But even after we've found our voice, life continues to change. Loss still finds us. Unexpected moments still reshape our future. Our final guest has spent her life helping people navigate uncertainty, not by resisting change, but by learning how to move with it. Her story reminds us that some of life's greatest transformations begin with the questions we never wanted to ask. Here's April Renee.

April Rinne [00:47:10 - 00:47:38]

More than 25 years ago, when I was in college, both of my parents died in a car accident. And that was that moment. I was 20 years old, and all of a sudden my life changed. Every single part of my life changed. The future I thought I was gonna have flipped upside down. And that was this flashpoint. There was the life before my parents died, and then there was the life after my parents died. And I was still me, but everything changed.

April Rinne [00:47:38 - 00:48:47]

And that was, you know, everything from how do I rebuild my family? How do I deal with my grief and anxiety? What does this mean for my career? I had to grow up really fast. I had to become self-sufficient really fast. I had this belief, you know, rational, irrational belief that developed afterwards that I didn't have long to live. So if I didn't have long to live, and again, it, my brain was just trying to figure out what had gone on and how was I gonna make my way through. And so it developed this belief that I didn't have long to live either, knowing that I was healthy and all that. But still you have this like, but wait, this could

happen to anybody, which led me to make very, very different decisions about what matters and what doesn't. And the way I like to frame it today, many years later, is that I had kind of the equivalent of a midlife crisis when I was 20. I didn't ask for it, but the questions I started asking at that pretty young age are very similar to the questions that I see people much later asking about, you know, what's the purpose of my life? Have I lived a life, you know, of meaning and fulfillment? And have I made the right choices and priorities and all that? And I did that at age 20, which had a profound effect on how the rest of my life turned out.

April Rinne [00:49:00 - 00:49:33]

20 is an interesting age. And I love this cuz I was away at college and I was actually overseas. So I got a phone call halfway around the world. And you know, this is the introductory story to the book as well, which is my sister who didn't expect to find me, didn't expect I would pick up the phone. So she had not rehearsed anything. She had just gotten the news herself, so she was in shock, but she knew she needed to let me know because we're the only 2 siblings. And it was the proverbial, I picked up the phone and she was like, oh my God. She was like, are you sitting down? Like, you have that, like, are you sitting down? And you go, that's not right.

April Rinne [00:49:34 - 00:49:58]

You know? And, and she's several years older than me and we were not particularly close. So the fact that she was calling me, I remember having this thought of like, well, if something happened to mom, dad would be calling. If something happened to dad, mom would be calling. If something happened to her, either of them would be calling. But There were no circumstances under which she would've been calling me. And so there was this, like, you have this unraveling, whoa. But back to the age 20. So I was living overseas.

April Rinne [00:49:58 - 00:50:36]

I knew how to care for myself on the day-to-day, and I had been working from a very young age. So like, I knew the basics of how to put one foot in front of the other. But at the same time, age 20s, I really had very little clue about how the world works, my place in it, all of that. So, you know, I, I have given a lot of thought in the years since. Had I been 3 years older, 3 years younger, I still would've been at home more or less, you know, a dependent. It would've been disruptive in a whole different way. 3 years later, I would've already started some kind of a career. I probably would've had to ask to take time off a job or, you know, and I was just in college.

April Rinne [00:50:36 - 00:50:56]

I was just in this limbo, like some, you know, swinging between 2 branches and just had that like, Whoa. Okay. What do you want to change? Because I had the ability even then, would I go to grad school? Would I grieve? Would I get a job? Would I travel? Like it was this blank script or blank slate, I should say. Wow. Wow.

April Rinne [00:50:57 - 00:51:12]

I mean, the fact that you're even going to school overseas and, you know, it just, it speaks to the maturity that you have. There's not a lot of people take those risks. So, I mean, I think your parents had set you up for success in many ways. At least I think that seems to be the goal.

April Rinne [00:51:12 - 00:51:42]

And so I love the global piece has been there from the very beginning. And I bet this will come up again on this, in this conversation. I just have a hunch, but both my parents were educators. So education was always really important and they also loved to travel. So we grew up without a lot of physical possessions, like wasn't about money, that's for sure. You know, and we can come back to this as well. Like I was taught I can make a dollar last forever. But the 2 things we were allowed to spend money on were education and travel.

April Rinne [00:51:43 - 00:52:11]

So not the tangibles, but the intangibles. And my dad was a geographer, cultural geographer, which meant that he studied the migratory patterns of people and plants and animals and cultures. And like, so global diversity and global stuff was like in my blood from birth. And so I loved maps and travel. And so I wanted an international career. I wanted to be away at school. I wanted that kind of Adventure. So that part was there.

April Rinne [00:52:12 - 00:53:05]

My mom, who also shared these loves, they set me up for a global perspective. They, they set me up to recognize and really fight for diversity as our strength, to see humans as fundamentally equal and that everyone has integrity and dignity. And, you know, that's the Kool-Aid I thought all kids were taught to drink. Only later did I learn, no, not at all. But at the same time, my mom had significant mental health challenges. I grew up in a household with constant anxiety, depression. I can now say bipolar, borderline bipolar. It wasn't diagnosed or even discussed back then, but it was a very fraught— it was also a childhood that was wracked by anxiety and wracked by worry and wracked by Fears, a lot of irrational fears too.

April Rinne [00:53:05 - 00:53:31]

Some founded, but some irrational. So being set up for success is like, it was a mixed bag. But I can definitely say my parents did the best they could with what they had, which I think all parents do. But not all parents are, you know, not all parents have a, you know, so much of what I struggled with came from what my parents were struggling with too. And I have a lot of respect for that as an adult because sure, there, there are definitely parts of my childhood I would've changed. But they all kind of fed into who I became.

April Rinne [00:53:32 - 00:53:54]

Yeah. And it's very well said. I mean, there's an element of that environment. It really shapes you and good or bad. And it really is something that you can evolve from because you can change your environment throughout the time that, you know, as you move

through life. But ultimately that foundation that they set puts you at that age 20 reacting to this tragic event. So what happened? Sorry, go ahead.

April Rinne [00:53:54 - 00:54:33]

Yeah, no, I, and I was just gonna put, how did I react? So they had prepared me so that sense of like seeing the good in everybody. I really tried. I, and after they died, I had to, I had to reach out to other people to survive. At the same time though, the first funeral that I ever went to, the first death I ever experienced was my parents. So I realize how lucky I am for that. I had never, like, My grandparents were living. I had never had really a pet die. So I had a lot of allergies growing up, so we could have like outdoor animals, but there weren't, I never became close to an animal because of my allergies, which again, double-edged sword.

April Rinne [00:54:33 - 00:55:04]

I wish I could have, but it also meant I didn't have that death of a pet. I didn't know what death was in a visceral way. And then I went from like 1 to 100. So as much as anyone can prepare for what life has in store, I don't think many people prepare. For like one day you're never gonna have been to a funeral and the next day both of your parents are gonna die. You know, it's like, wow, I just jumped in at the deep end, you know, without a life jacket. But also I didn't really have much choice. And so I would learn how to swim, I would learn how to tread water, I would learn how to, you know, ultimately jump off a diving board as well.

Tony Martignetti [00:55:06 - 00:55:26]

Every one of us experiences moments that divide our lives into a before and an after. For April, Losing both of her parents at such a young age forced her to ask questions most of us hope we never have to answer. Not simply, how do we survive? But who do I become now?

April Rinne [00:55:27 - 00:56:07]

I have such immense love and respect for my sister because we were both pretty young. So she basically 4 years older than me. So she had graduated from college, but she was taking a couple years to work and save some money and then go to grad school kind of thing. So it's still young, but Was a bit more independent than I was in that regard. But here's the thing, we were not close and our parents kind of, again, they didn't do this intentionally. I think it just happens sometimes, but we were set up to kind of compete with one another, not in a healthy way. And so we hadn't developed that, like there wasn't a close, close sister bond. I mean, we liked each other, we knew each other, but I had been studying overseas all year and we had not talked.

April Rinne [00:56:07 - 00:56:09]

That shows you like we were not that close.

April Rinne [00:56:09 - 00:56:56]

And then all of a sudden they die and we're put under incredibly stressful circumstances to make some incredibly hard decisions to, we're both dealing with our grief and anxiety and

challenges having nothing to do with our parents, you know, our own lives. Right. And gosh, where do you start? Because, so this is where I, I have to credit my sister. She had at age 24. The emotional maturity and wisdom, I do not know how she did it. I do not possess this wisdom even today. But, you know, she said, she came to me and said, we have to reestablish our relationship and we have to figure out what it looks like moving forward because it's not what it was before. We are all we have left in terms of immediate family.

April Rinne [00:56:56 - 00:57:01]

Now, many years later, we both have extended families. We're married. We have families of choice.

Tony Martignetti [00:57:01 - 00:57:02]

You know, it's.

April Rinne [00:57:02 - 00:57:24]

That part has really blossomed. But back then it was this sense of like, this is ground zero. We have to rebuild. And then this is just a fun anecdote. So I was overseas. She was in Portland, Oregon, which is actually where I'm joining you from today. And the accident happened in Colorado. So we were both called back to Colorado, which is where my parents lived.

April Rinne [00:57:24 - 00:57:30]

Neither of us really wanted to be there because it, you know, it was tragic and stressful and we weren't there by choice. We were there because of life.

April Rinne [00:57:31 - 00:57:54]

And she said, listen, we have to figure this out. I'm going back to Portland. And she said, you need to come with me, but I'm not your mom. You can't live with me. You have to get your feet on the ground. You have to walk through the fire yourself. I can't do that for you, and you're not gonna grow unless you do. But we need to be close enough so that we can see each other.

April Rinne [00:57:55 - 00:58:43]

We can grieve, we can process, we can, we have to. To get through this together. And so what ended up happening is I took a term off of college cuz I, I was in no state to go try to study. It was, no, I was a wreck. So I took a semester off and I moved to Portland, Oregon, and it was the deepest, darkest chapter of my life, even to this day. But it did exactly what she knew it needed to do, which was to start repairing, like How, like to get to know each other. And then the side story there is that knowing almost no one, we had some, you know, couple friends, cousin, couple cousins who lived here, but I didn't really know anybody in Portland. Fell head over heels in love with the city and vowed to myself that someday I would return to live in some capacity.

April Rinne [00:58:43 - 00:59:11]

And lo and behold, that's where I'm dialing in from today. So anyway, long-winded story, but yeah, I, the question about my sister, she's an amazing human being. But it was not easy right off the bat. It was really fraught, but we learned to grow. It taught me so much about not just sister relationships or friendships, but like how you connect, how you restore relationships that have been really, you know, pretty battered and bruised.

April Rinne [00:59:12 - 00:59:36]

I mean, it's a, when there's a need for connection, you can make things happen. It's just about seeing each other from different points of view and I always think about that, like right now, especially with connections that have been so fraught through the pandemic and a lot of challenges, very different scenario, but similar in the sense that people are reconnecting for the first time and we have to kind of get to know each other on different terms from what we used to be.

April Rinne [00:59:37 - 01:00:44]

And I think I found that both during lockdown, when all of a sudden it was like, wow, I get to know you, like not just through a Zoom screen, but like You're in a very different place. You're, we're all, and this relates directly to Flux as well. I didn't write the book about 2020 or the pandemic, but it's like I walked into the best example, the best validation I could hope for, for my ideas, which is you're getting to know somebody when the world's, not that it did this for everybody, but to some degree, you know, that sense of the world slowing down, the world stopping, at least from a mobility perspective, right? All of a sudden you get to know people differently. And you slow down and you start to cherish things that you took for granted before and all of that sort of thing. And then I'm finding it again as we try to figure out what's next, you know, and I won't call it reopening and I won't call it hybrid. It's a bunch of different things, but this whole like, how do I want to show up? I've just had this experience. We've all had this experience of getting to know people differently and then wanting to show up. a little bit differently or wanting to improve things about how we, you know, not just relate to others, but I like to say how we relate to change as well.

April Rinne [01:00:44 - 01:00:48]

And so we're still writing that part of the book.

Tony Martignetti [01:00:49 - 01:01:04]

One of the most beautiful parts of April's story is that healing didn't erase her loss. It changed the way she carried it. And sometimes that's what hope looks like. Not forgetting, not moving on, But moving forward.

April Rinne [01:01:05 - 01:01:36]

I've thought this for a while, but the last 18, 20 months have really brought it home. Just this sense that we are all, we always have been, and we always are on borrowed time, that none of us has any right to be here. So, and this gets a little provocative, but maybe another kind of flashpoint. I remember when I had this thought for the first time years ago, but

there was this like, ooh, that sounds really horrible. And then it's like, no, it actually sounds really uplifting. Hang on here. What's going on?

April Rinne [01:01:36 - 01:01:36]

You know?

April Rinne [01:01:36 - 01:02:24]

And it's basically that I fundamentally believe all humans have their fundamental human rights, right? We have the right to have dignity and integrity and respect. We have the right to work. Not that we have a guarantee of a job or promotion kind of thing, but we have the right to use our skills, develop our skills, use our efforts. We have the right to love and be loved. Like we have all of these rights as humans, just the fact of being human. But if we peel back the layer of that onion, just one more layer, none of us actually has the right to be here to begin with, right? Like this sense of borrowed time. Yes, we have all of these rights once we exist, but the fact of our existence is such a, a miracle and such a stroke of magic and good luck. That's the part I just never want to forget to be grateful for.

April Rinne [01:02:25 - 01:02:48]

That I can talk about all the things that I— rights and privileges and responsibilities and all that. But at a deeper level, the right to even be here isn't something that is inherent in the human condition. It's a huge gift. And I feel like that became clearer in the last year and a half also, but just in general, it's like, that's kind of how I want to live my life. Yeah.

Tony Martignetti [01:02:48 - 01:03:04]

It reminds me of the Stoic philosophy around memento mori. I'm probably butchering the way it's pronounced, but this, you know, remembering that, you know, you may die tomorrow and you have to like kind of see your life as being like a fleeting moment in time.

April Rinne [01:03:05 - 01:03:07]

Exactly. Yeah.

Lane Gardner [01:03:07 - 01:03:18]

All the other things that you described, I think are so powerful because I truly believe in all that. There are rights while you're here, but the fact that you're here is that is kind of a gift that you have no control of.

April Rinne [01:03:19 - 01:04:08]

Exactly. And it's interesting not to go back to the story of my parents, but it is true. And I've, this shows up quite a few places in the book where back then this like, what do I do when I don't know what to do? Like everything's changed. Where do I start? And the question, the core question that kind of grounded me and rooted me and allowed me to move forward, but through which I filtered pretty much everything. But it goes back to this irrational fear that I had about, I might not have long to live either. But I would always ask, if I were to die tomorrow, what would the world need me to do today? And I remember in the immediate

aftermath asking that, 'cause I was like, I think I am gonna die tomorrow. And not that I was going to, but like that my brain was already there. And that ended up being helpful in some ways to walk through that fire.

April Rinne [01:04:09 - 01:05:04]

But it was interesting because, and I think this is due in some non-trivial part to my parents. It wasn't, if I were to die tomorrow, what does my ego need me to do today? It wasn't what sounds fun to do today. It was always, what does the world need me to do today? Like, how can I be of service to others? How can I put humanity at the center? Because if anything, I, and respectfully you, and respectfully anyone who's listening to this, we are all just kind of specks in a much larger, you know, vortex of humanity and stars and, you know, universes, and I'll go a little bit woo-woo here, but that really grounded me. It was never about me. It was how do I relate to this bigger thing that will continue to exist even after I'm gone? And there's a weird comfort in that, knowing that you can contribute to something that will exist when you're not here. Make that your legacy. Make that your contribution.

Tony Martignetti [01:05:05 - 01:05:06]

So beautiful.

Tony Martignetti [01:05:06 - 01:05:26]

I feel like I could talk to you about like Pretty much all day we have kind of a conversation. So tell me more about any other flashpoints along the way that you want to bring to light around, like, as you moved through your, you know, your 20s in it, you know, what happened next? How did you get into the work that you were doing and what really brought you to where you are today?

April Rinne [01:05:26 - 01:05:49]

Oh gosh. That first flashpoint was so, it's kind of, that one's like not easy. I mean, it's big, but it's like, oh, right. I can honestly say that. Even many years later, like, I still— that one was such the defining moment, but there were many others along the way. They didn't have the same— thankfully, they didn't have the same level of tragedy, but they didn't have— they formed me in different ways. So let me think about a couple.

Ann Brennan [01:05:50 - 01:05:51]

Well, it's interesting.

April Rinne [01:05:51 - 01:05:57]

I don't know if we can take some that are more on the— I see personal growth and professional development as so interconnected.

Lane Gardner [01:05:58 - 01:05:58]

Yeah.

April Rinne [01:05:58 - 01:07:03]

But there's one that keeps coming to mind, and it shows up in Superpowers, and it shows up in more and more conversations. Particularly if I think about today with like great resignation, how people are feeling, where do we head with all this? And one of the 8 flux superpowers is what I call create your portfolio career, which is all about seeing your career more as a portfolio that you would curate like an artist or an investor would, rather than a singular line or a singular path to pursue. So rather than a career path, look as a career portfolio. And it's gaining lots of traction, not just because of all the change and uncertainty, but also because people are like, I want more meaning and purpose in my life. And going back to the question, I'm glad I seeded the question about like, if I were to die tomorrow, what does the world need me to do today? That guided my professional decisions. And shortly after my parents died, you know, I did have to graduate from college and get a job and head into the world. And the world had not treated me particularly kindly. So I was trying to figure out What do I do? And I didn't have any parental accountability in terms of like, I didn't have parents saying you have to be a lawyer or a doctor or some— didn't have that.

April Rinne [01:07:04 - 01:07:37]

But I also didn't have a sounding board and I also didn't have like a backstop. So it was like, figure it out. And a lot of my mentors and professors and whatnot were saying, well, with your credentials, you should go work at an investment bank or a consulting firm. And that's a great place to start. You learn skills and all that. And I have immense respect for banks and consulting firms. This is not a criticism of what they do. This was simply me asking, so if I'm going to die tomorrow, does the world need another consultant or banker? And I was like, no, not me.

April Rinne [01:07:37 - 01:07:52]

Right. Society was saying, turn left, if you will, or turn right, take your pick. Right. And I was going, no, if I die tomorrow, I'm taking a hard right. I am not going the corporate ladder. I am not. It didn't speak to me. But from that existential perspective.

April Rinne [01:07:53 - 01:08:50]

And so back then, uh, what I decided to do, I actually did not go the investment bank or consulting route. I went and guided hiking and biking trips around the world, earning far less money, but seeing the world and learning a ton about how other people lived and what I cared most about and my travel bug and all the rest. And I had people at that time. So the flashpoint is people going, what the hell are you doing with your career? What the hell are you doing with your life? You look like you can't focus on anything. You like, no grad school's ever gonna accept you and you look like a dilettante. What are you trying to escape? Also, I got, you look like you're having too much fun, or, you know, this job looks too much too fun. I was getting all of this flack and I was like, In total fairness, I was like, I am going through such grief and anxiety. I am not the real world.

April Rinne [01:08:50 - 01:09:27]

If the real world is banks and consulting firms, I need nothing of it. I need to heal my heart. And what I did though, I also, you know, had very little overhead. I had to take care of myself, but I did not have a mortgage to pay, a family to raise, none of that. And what I ended up doing is I guided trips for 6 months of the year and I worked my tail off and I got paid not a lot of money, but my job was to get people to ride their bicycles through vineyards and to translate wine tastings. It was a pretty fun job. And that gave me not enough income again to raise a family, but enough income to travel the other 6 months of the year. And so I did that.

April Rinne [01:09:27 - 01:10:21]

I didn't have a permanent address for the better part of 4 years. And I got to see a lot of the world as well, because all of the income I earned, I could spend on travel. I realized If I'm going to die tomorrow, then I don't need to be laser focused on save, save, save, save, save, but I have to be financially responsible. So it's important, but it's not going to define me this like more, more, more, more, more. Anyway, coming back to the flashpoint where I had people giving me such flack for the decisions I was making that spoke to my heart. But then when I realized that it wasn't, even if I put my parent, like what would my parents say? That ultimately it wasn't the, how can you, we want you to be the person with the fancy title in the corner office. They were like, we would like for you to be happy and helping others. And when I realized if I defined myself that way, then all this flack I was getting, I could just see it sort of melt away.

April Rinne [01:10:21 - 01:11:07]

And that took time and practice and all the rest. But here's the hook. So that was one flashpoint of this. Like, I think the lens I need to look through is that one. Not the, what are these external trappings and societal expectations? But then several years later, the same, this was the other flashpoint, the one that I kind of like more, the same people who had given me such hell in my 20s and were like, what are you doing? Because I ended up going from dieting, I went to law school, I did my graduate work. Then I ended up taking these credentials and doing very atypical things with them. which took time and effort and thought and all of the rest, but they made sense to me. These people came back to me and they were like, oh, how do we do what you did? And there was this moment of, okay.

April Rinne [01:11:08 - 01:12:07]

And I didn't need that validation. I didn't need, you know, I had no resentment at that point, but there was this, this flashpoint of this is hard work to get clear on your values and your priorities and make all the pieces fit together in your unique mosaic of life. But my goodness, it's worth it. And it's that sense of what it means to really explore your life and take risks and recognize privilege when it's there. And also recognize the different kinds of privilege, which, you know, usually think of that in terms of like money, the privilege of freedom, the privilege of being raised in an emotionally sane household. That's actually, I think, more important than any kind of money, just being raised in a household with love. being raised, you know, having your health. All of these are kinds of privileges, but that flashpoint of the whole, like, I had this, it was like all of a sudden all that hard work and the kind of soul searching that society was saying looked frivolous, that in fact it was valued.

April Rinne [01:12:07 - 01:12:28]

That was hugely important. And then hearing that made me say, okay, I am on my own career path or my own, you know, I am curating my own portfolio. This is really hard work. It's uncharted territory because it doesn't align with what society wants to see, but it made me double down on my interest and desire to dig into what had the greatest meaning for me. And that has made a ton of difference.

Tony Martignetti [01:12:29 - 01:12:55]

It's so beautiful what you describe. And that's something that comes up for me when you describe this. It's, it's like having the courage to follow your spark and allow it to take you to the, into this unknown, into this place where You don't know exactly what this is all gonna mean in the end, but you know that it's leading you to something that's meaningful to you. And ultimately that's where all this comes together into a portfolio that makes sense.

April Rinne [01:12:56 - 01:13:43]

And the portfolio that no one else, no one else has it. No one else can have it because it's my life. But similarly, your portfolio and anyone listening, anyone tuning in, like your portfolio is uniquely you. No one can ever have your portfolio. And guess what? No one can ever take it away from you either. Unlike a job, which always, I mean, this sounds a little bit blunt, but even if you love your job, even if you're really good at your job, even if you wanna do it for the rest of your life, if it's a job that someone else gave you, you are forever at risk of it being taken away. And that's really unsettling and it's kind of unfair, but it's the reality of life versus this notion of what does it look like? What does it mean to create and curate your portfolio? It's actually incredibly empowering and uplifting. It doesn't mean you're not gonna have to adapt.

April Rinne [01:13:43 - 01:14:11]

It doesn't mean you'll always know what to do, but you know, it goes back to what you were saying about journey. And yes, I think it's this whole notion of the, it's the journey, not the destination. That's a little bit overused. I don't mean to be just hashing, rehashing that, but it is so true. It's not about whether you get to some end goal, it's whether or not, like, I, I still have this notion of, I think I have longer than a year to live. You know, I plan to live to be triple digits. But I always have this notion of like, I may not be here for long. I don't know.

April Rinne [01:14:11 - 01:14:43]

But I will admit that when I go to bed most nights, I still say, if this were the last day that I had, would I have spent it in a way I can justify? And that includes boring days, days spent in front of a computer. You know, it's not all kind of leisure and fun. Hard work is part of the journey. But this notion, and some days I get to spend it outdoors and some days I'm cooped up indoors, but like that sense of, did I Did I follow that true north? Did I follow that thread of my life that is carrying me forward?

Tony Martignetti [01:14:43 - 01:15:32]

What I love about these 3 conversations is that none of our guests suggest there is a shortcut through hardship. Anne reminds us that healing begins with the courage to ask for help. Layne shows us that creativity and vulnerability can give voice to pain we can no longer carry alone. And April challenges us to see change not as something, something to fear, but as something that can deepen our gratitude, reshape our purpose, and remind us that every day is a gift. Darkness will visit every one of us, but it doesn't have to define us. Sometimes out of darkness comes compassion. Out of darkness comes connection. And if we're willing to keep moving forward, out of darkness comes the light.

Tony Martignetti [01:15:33 - 01:16:33]

I want to express my deep gratitude to Anne Brennan, Lane Gardner, and April Rinne for sharing their stories, insights, and experiences so openly and generously. And to all of you listeners, thank you for joining us on this journey around the virtual campfire. It's been great to have you with us. If you'd like to learn more about today's guests, connect with their work, or explore their books, organizations, and resources, you'll find links for each of them in the show notes for this episode. If this conversation resonated with you, I encourage you to reflect on this question: what part of your world are you being called to create next? Before you go, please subscribe to the Virtual Campfire Podcast. If you enjoyed this episode, I'd love to hear from you. Leave a comment or review and share this episode with someone who would benefit from listening. And if you're ready to take the next step in your own journey or would like to learn more, visit tonymspeaks.com.

Tony Martignetti [01:16:33 - 01:16:48]

This special series inspired by the themes of Campfire Lessons for Leaders is proudly produced by It All Works. Until next time. Keep leading, keep growing, and keep showing up for the life you're meant to create.