

Announcer: Bulletproof Radio, a stage of high performance.

Dave: You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today's cool fact of the day is that Google Glass, those funky, augmented reality glasses is showing promise as a tool that help kids with autism better navigate social situations. As someone who has or at least had the symptoms of Asperger's syndrome as a kid, they didn't really have a formal diagnosis when I was a kid. I definitely would have appreciated some technology guidance for social situations, and there's a new smart phone app that pairs your Google as headset with facial recognition software, the wearer gets real-time updates on what emotions people are expressing. Because believe it or not, when you're on the spectrum like that you have no idea what the person across from you is feeling, but you would know if something told you, "That face equals this emotion," which would be really cool for a lot of people. Most kids just naturally learn to do this without thinking, by playing, and kids with autism don't really get it, and they have to learn.

Dave: In my case, I spent a lot of time in my early 20's going to business networking meetings and making an ass of myself, until I figured out how to play the game right, and I've hacked my brain at the biological level with a lot of nerve feedbacks. I actually can read emotions a lot better than I ever did, but man, I wish I would had some technology to do that, which is just really cool. In a pilot trial 14 kids used the program for just over 10 weeks, and after the treatment they had improved social skills, increased eye contact, and the ability to decode facial expressions. That is a really cool use of technology that's never been done before.

Dave: Now, today's interview is going to be pretty cool because it's with a guy who definitely had a reason to read some social situations and emotions in a life or death situation. We're going to be talking with a guy who's a [inaudible 00:02:00] writer, a literary journalist, and a novelist, who covered in 2011 10 Somali Pirates in Germany for Spiegel Online, part of The Mirror, which is a German weekly news magazine. After the trial he went to Somalia in 2012 to research a book about piracy, and how to end it, and got kidnapped and held hostage for 32 months. He was freed in September 2014, largely by his mother's efforts to gain his release, and wrote a memoir about it that came out in July, it's called The Desert and The Sea: 977 Days Captive on the Somali Pirate Coast. We are talking about none other than Michael Scott Moore. Michael, welcome to the show.

Michael: Hi, Dave.

Dave: Now, I think you prefer Mike normally, but you go by Michael as an author?

Michael: It doesn't matter.

Dave: It don't matter, all right.

Michael: Honestly.

Dave: Now, you've gone through this incredible experience. You were 45 when you were kidnapped, and your idea was to just go in and learn, and then basically some people grabbed you. What happened?

Michael: 45 when I was released.

Dave: When you're released, okay.

Michael: I'd spent a good chunk of my mid-40's in Somalia. No, I went there partly because of the trial that I was following in Hamburg of the 10 pirates, and at least five of them were from Central Somalia. First, I went with a partner, another journalist, and we first went to a town called Galkayo, which is not even near the coast. Five of the defendants were from Galkayo. We thought that we'd get ... I thought I would get some background on that story, and also a lot of information about how pirate ransom had affected the Somali economy, because Galkayo was one of the places where there was obviously some money sloshing around. I also thought that I would get some good information on a book about Somali piracy, hitting some points that I thought no one else was quite reaching. That's why we went. That's why I set off in January in 2012.

Dave: You decide to do it, tell me about when you got grabbed.

Michael: I was with another journalist named Ashwin Raman, who was a documentary maker for German television and he, after we spent about 10 days in Somalia he decided to go to Mogadishu, which meant we went to the airport. We decided to do everything together and stick together with our guards, our security and that kind of thing. He got on the plane safely, and we saw him off, and it was on the way back from the airport towards Galkayo, downtown Galkayo that we actually met a truck waiting for our car. Actually a technical, which is a battlewagon, a flatbed truck, with a cannon in the back, sort of an anti-aircraft cannon. These are very typical vehicles in the Somalia civil war, but one was waiting by the side of the road, and it stopped our car, and aimed that cannon through the windshield. My security basically gave up, felt overpowered, never fired a shot, and about a dozen guys with Kalashnikov's on the back of that technical came around to my side of the car and pulled me out.

Dave: They just grabbed you, did they tell you why they were doing it? Was this reprisal? What was the motivation or was it just for ransom?

Michael: There was no explanation, nothing like that. I tried to hold the door closed, they ripped it open and beat my wrist until it was broken, and pulled me out and beat my head. It was extremely violent, and then we spent about three or four hours in another ... They [inaudible 00:05:45] into a car, and we spent three or four hours driving into the bush, which means no one told me a thing. There was no explanation at all. I think in fact that technical was waiting for both of us, they probably wanted us to take that particular road out to the airport, and they were probably disappointed not to have two foreign journalists captive. Ashwin feels actually lucky that he didn't get captured with me, but within a week I made a phone call home, and by then the pirates had said, "Oh, we think

you're a spy." That was the justification they gave me, but you hear that a lot actually among kidnap stories that involve journalists.

Dave: Did you go training ahead of time about what to do if you're kidnapped?

Michael: No, I didn't have any training in that sort of thing.

Dave: Do you wish you had?

Michael: Only for ... I mean yes and no. There was a training through the German Journalist Union that I could have taken, and I thought about it. It's just that the timing was wrong. The one thing I really needed training for, and that I would like to give training to other people about, is mounting a hunger strike. I'm not sure that it was involved in the training. I'm sure I would have learned a few things upfront that I spent time learning while I was there, but the most important thing to me was being able to navigate a hunger strike, and that took some experience.

Dave: I did an urban escape innovation training for several days, and not that I have a great fear of being kidnapped or anything like that, I just thought it would be cool to know how to pick handcuffs, and know if you're being tailed, and all that kind of stuff. It was actually a really eye-opening experience for me just to understand the stress, where the final exam was being hooded and handcuffed, and escaping, and being followed through a city where people are trying to catch you. It was actually frankly terrifying at a level that was still just training, and you went through that at a whole another level, but you're sitting here talking about it relatively calmly. You're not in tears or showing signs of physical stress from this, what did you do? You had hits to the head, you have broken wrist months and months, frankly years of captivity, but you seem reasonably well-put together, what did you do to get over this?

Michael: Well, it's been a few years now. The main thing is that I wrote the book. I wouldn't have been able to talk about it like this before I wrote the book. The book, first of all, it had the effect of talk therapy. It allowed me to put all the events into some sort of narrative, but it also just made me fluent with the material in a way that I wasn't when I got out in 2014. It's been a few years, that helps. It probably took me a year to recover physically, but mentally I'm probably okay, but I take it one day at a time. I don't take anything for granted.

Dave: I interviewed Lara Logan, the 60 Minutes correspondent who had a real traumatic experience in Egypt. We had a similar discussion, and the reason I'm asking this is that there are a lot of people listening who go through traumatic experiences, most of them nowhere near as intense and enduring as yours, and people bear scars in different ways, and people recover in different ways. I'm really curious, you spent a year physically recovering, did you get therapy? Did you go to post-hostage counseling or was this sort of a solo thing or a family thing? What's your approach to just putting your head back together again after that?

Michael: Well, the FBI had a psychologist by my side as soon as I got off the plane, in fact before I got off the plane. I didn't realize he was a psychologist until we landed in Nairobi, but he wound up on the C-130 that the Air Force used to fly me out of Somalia. He was really good, and he had experience, I think in the Special Forces, and also dealing with soldiers who had PTSD. At some point I realized that he was probably there to diagnose me, and I turned to him, even those first few days before I flew back to Europe, while we were still in Nairobi, I said, "Are you here because I might have PTSD?" He said, "We don't like to put a label on anything."

Michael: In those first few days I definitely had symptoms. I had written about PTSD before so I knew what they were, and I was easily hypervigilant. I got nervous when there were too many ... when we went out in public in Nairobi and there were too many people around, too many strangers, too much input to keep track of. But in those first few weeks while I was still debriefing with the FBI, the psychologist flew back with me to Berlin, along with a couple of agents both from the US and from Germany, I gave the first version of the story first of all. I told it from start to finish for the first time, and he was there everyday. He was ... What can I say? He was excellent. He told me things before I knew I was going through them, which I found a little bit annoying at first, but he saw everything coming, and read me really well.

Michael: After a few months when I saw him again, I think for lunch at some point, I said, "You know I'm not in regular therapy, and should I be worried about that? Should I be in talk therapy?" By this time I had started my book, and he said, "You know, we don't need to pathologize anything. In other words, you don't have to create a condition in your mind that you then also have to recover from. You have enough to recover from on your own." In fact, in my case anyway, the body and mind know how to do that if you just leave them alone, not leave them alone. I exercise. I went to the gym. I was incredibly thin and weak when I first got out, and I knew I need a lot, but after seeing a few doctors I knew physically what I needed, and as I started to recover physically the mental stuff also took care of itself slowly, slowly.

Dave: I interviewed a guy, a physician named Mark Gordon, who believes that people don't get long-lasting PTSD unless they have a traumatic brain injury, but you took some substantial hits to that. Did you get diagnosed with a brain injury or is your brain okay?

Michael: I'm pretty sure I didn't have a brain injury. I probably ... Another aspect of PTSD supposedly is that you get flooded with stress hormones, and it can affect a couple of glands in there. I was certainly flooded with cortisol more than once. I definitely felt that, but was I permanently changed? I'm not so sure. I've read a couple of books in the meantime, including the one book, *The Body Keeps the Score* by Dr. Van der Kolk, a Dutch-American, I think, and it's quite good. Obviously these things leave traces, but I have to say that yoga helped quite a bit, both while I was there, and also afterwards.

Dave: You did yoga when you were with your captors?

Michael: Yeah.

Dave: What did they think about that?

Michael: They thought it was hilarious. When I got ... I was held in several places. When I first was captured I was held in the bush for about three months, with one other hostage that they put me together with. Then they put us on a ship, where we had about 30 other hostages to be friends with. All that was very social. After the ship they held me alone on land, and once it became clear to me that I was going to be on land for ... Well, even before I realized how long I was going to be there, I asked for a mat to do yoga, to do exercise because the prison houses were very barren, and concrete and dirty so I asked for a mat. I looked for a moment where the guards weren't watching me, because I knew they would think yoga was ridiculous, but they were watching me 24 hours a day.

Michael: One day I just started doing it, and all these heads came in around the doorway, there's a laugh and snicker. Then a couple of them came in and imitated me, I figured they were joking, but after a couple of days they kept doing it. They brought in broken down cardboard boxes for mats, because like I said the floor was filthy. They had these cardboard flats that they used as their yoga mats, and they imitated my postures, and the ones who kept doing it I realized they were afraid of me getting in shape while they didn't. They were also locked in the compound and they were aware of becoming weak too physically. They were trying to do the exercise with me, and eventually I gave them tips, I corrected their postures. The whole thing didn't last more than a few weeks, but I continue to do yoga, and they sort of fell off.

Dave: Did you ever form a connection to any of them? Some were friendly and all, tell me about that.

Michael: Sure. There were, I would say when I was being held alone like that in solitary after the ship, there was always a team of at least seven guys, up to 15 guys, maybe an average of 10, and about half of them were willing to talk to me, were willing to get along with me. They had a little bit of English, and I had a little bit of Somalian so we built up a pigeon to communicate with. Sure, I got to know them as individuals.

Dave: What was it like when you got out? Walk me through what happened?

Michael: Well, when I got out ... When I say that I became friendly with a few guards it was still on this basis of being enemies. You still had very simple conversations, and you knew that you couldn't trust a pirate guard very far. I got out and all of a sudden I was in the hands of people who meant me well. First, the bush pilot who flew out, then some American Air Force people on the C-130, the transfer plane that flew me finally to Nairobi, and then my family and friends once we flew back to Berlin. I didn't know how to deal with that. I was glad to be free, but I didn't know how to deal with so many well-meaning people speaking my own language. In that sense it was possibly a little bit like having Asperger's. I think that I was easily overwhelmed by all the possible social cues, and all the ways that we communicate that are inferable.

Michael: I had simply lost practice dealing with that, and it took me a while to feel strong enough to just have a coming home party. There would have been too many people in the room

at once. It took two or three weeks before I could do something like that, of course my mother was there, my immediate German family, and I saw some friends obviously in the first few days, but I tried to keep the group situations to a minimum because I was so easily overwhelmed.

Dave: Tell me about hope. Were you hopeful all the time?

Michael: No, not at all, especially after about a year had elapsed I got really despondent. By that point I was in this prison house and just dealing with a team of guards, and they would try to tell me, "You know you're going to go free in two weeks," or, "You're going to go free in a month." I believed them at first. I was stupid enough to get my hopes up and I realized pretty quickly that, that was not the way to go. After a month, when you realized that this date has passed that they promised to set you free on you got even more depressed, and more despondent than before. In other words, hope and despair were a cycle, which I described in *The Desert and the Sea* as a breaking will. It was really a torturous cycle, and eventually I had to detach myself from it entirely, which is a Buddhist idea.

Dave: How did you go about detaching from hope?

Michael: I had to stop thinking about the future. Certainly after two years I thought, "Well, there's a really good chance I'm not going to get out of here alive, and it's entirely probable I'm not going to see my family and friends again." Even if someone tries something drastic, and tries to rescue me militarily there's only going to be a certain percentage of chance that I would survive, and a pretty good percentage of chance that the pirates are just going to let me die of neglect or kill me by accident, which happens. They tend not to kill hostages on purpose over there, but I stopped living for the future. I stopped thinking and looking forward to the day when I was going to be free and see my family and friends again, because I didn't trust that, that was even going to happen. But I also had to make a conscious decision from day to day whether I was going to continue to live, and that puts you more or less in the moment, that makes you deal with the present. That was a tough discipline, but a very essential one.

Dave: What made you decide to live?

Michael: There was a period where I wrestled with whether I was going to pick up a gun, they had guns lying around all the time, and either end my own life or try to blast my way out, which would have been suicide on its own because there were too many guards. I was angry at them all the time. I was obviously emotional even though I kept my mouth shut most of the time. I stopped wrestling with that quite so much when I made a conscious decision to forgive them. The way that it occurred to me was that I was listening to the radio, and I actually heard the new Pope. I wasn't sure what had happened to the old Pope, but there was a new Pope, Pope Francis, and he gave a very interesting homily about forgiveness, that included a very simple image, which is the image of the stars and the sun.

Michael: He said, "At night we're very aware of all our shortcomings and all our failings, and all our sins," which spoke to me as a hostage. I felt guilty for just getting myself into that position. He said, "But in the morning the sun rises, and banishes the stars," and he said, "The mercy of God is like that." The idea behind that of course is to pass it on, is to apply it to other people who you might not be in the mood to forgive. As soon as I did that, and it was a conscious decision, and forgave my guards on a daily basis, I had to keep doing it, my mind was better. My mind was no longer full of victimhood. It was no longer full of anger, and it wasn't as despondent or desperate. I still wasn't sure I was going to see my family and friends again, but I could see my way to surviving from day to day.

Dave: Have you had a chance to thank the Pope for that homily?

Michael: No, I haven't as a matter of fact. I'm not quite sure how to get in touch with him, but that's a very good point.

Dave: I missed the chance to have a private audience with the Pope earlier this year, because it was my kid's birthday, and I'm not going to miss my kid's birthday. I suspect it would be beneficial for you to do that, both for you and him because it's always good to know you did someone [inaudible 00:22:38] that you didn't know you were doing.

Michael: That's a very good point, maybe I should write to the Vatican.

Dave: I think that would be powerful. It's profound that you found forgiveness in the middle of a hellish situation there. I'm grateful that you just shared that with everyone listening, because forgiveness on a daily basis is definitely a practice that I follow, and something that I do with electrodes hooked to my head to make sure I'm doing it all the way. Because if you're carrying a lot of baggage towards your captors or towards people who are mean to you or whatever, it cause you a lot. On the first day you did it, you felt a different sense, like your brain turned on.

Michael: First of all, it was very overwhelming to hear that on the radio, and the conscious decision to change my attitude, and to re-orient my mind. It's a question of judgment. I was sitting there judging the guards for doing something that was obviously evil, but I go into this in The Desert and the Sea too, Epictetus was a Stoic philosopher who points out that the only real freedom we have is to choose between good and bad. He talks about turning that judgment inward, and once you do that you just quit worrying about whether your prosecutor is good or bad, and worry about your own mind, which is what you actually have control over, then the world changes, and that's exactly what happened.

Dave: That is truly amazing. Do you still forgive your captors on a daily basis?

Michael: Yes, that doesn't mean I don't want a couple of them to face justice, but-

Dave: You cannot forgive someone and still want them to be in jail.

Michael: That's right, but it's a question of holding that emotional grudge.

Dave: What does your forgiveness practice look like?

Michael: If I start to get frustrated, if I start to get angry and hit some sort of ... one of these roadblocks, first of all, I think about everything that I went through, and the fact that I'm out and alive, and that brings me back to the gratitude I felt when I first got out, and that helps loosen the rest of it. That gratitude helps with forgiveness.

Dave: In the neuroscience training program I do with executives, I simply don't believe based on brainwaves that you can forgive until you have the feeling of gratitude.

Michael: I think that's right. I think that's exactly-

Dave: You did yoga, but you didn't have training in forgiveness and gratitude, a practice based in that, were you Catholic? You're talking about the Pope, were you Catholic or are you Catholic?

Michael: I was raised Catholic. I was a very pious Catholic boy. I would say I'm a lapsed Catholic, still because I'm a little bit too promiscuous with my sources of wisdom, I think. The Vatican would still probably not accept me as a fully onboard Catholic.

Dave: Well, you definitely had some powerful wisdom that came your way when you were doing that. Did you hallucinate?

Michael: That's a good question, probably not, but it's hard to say sometimes. I had very strange ideas while I was there so it's not off the table.

Dave: I guess if you're hallucinating, you're not sure you're hallucinating. That would be the definition of hallucination, all right, [inaudible 00:26:18]. Tell me about hunger, and hunger strikes, what happened there?

Michael: It took a while for me to mount one, and bother with a hunger strike because I wasn't sure they would work, and I'm not sure that I wasn't punished for them either by the way. But at one point the pirates put chains on my feet, and I was a little bit naughty I got rid of the keys, but they couldn't prove that I had thrown the keys down the toilet. Just to make sure they had left the chains on me in the morning when it was time for breakfast, and that was unusual, the chains had been on my feet at night for maybe a month or a few weeks at that point. I was so angry, and so upset they didn't ... No, they did bring me a bowl of beans, but they hadn't removed the chains and I said, "No, I'm not eating." It was incredible, they got very agitated right away, and for the first time, and this was just after a year, the first time in maybe 14 months I felt powerful.

Michael: I felt like I had some influence over the men who were controlling my life. They got really upset that I didn't want to eat breakfast, and they ordered some lunch from outside, they had ... The best food you could get as a hostage was camel meat, and they obviously ordered camel meat, the whole prison house filled up with the smell, and then

they invited me to join them and eat. They had a great feast over there, and I said, "No," because my chains were still on. I had to decide exactly when I was going to quit. Once I had declared the hunger strike I realized I was in a situation, and I had to decide what my own terms were. I figured it was going to last a couple of days, but they were so upset by this hunger strike that after inviting me to eat lunch maybe twice, they said, "Okay, what do you need?" I said, "Take off the chains." They said, "Okay, if we take off chains you'll eat?" I said, "Yeah." It worked.

Michael: That was the first time I had any kind of power like that over the pirates. I used it again a few times whenever they forgot to give me beans for breakfast, in other words it's out of negligence, they just didn't bring me breakfast in the morning. Keep in mind I was hungry all the time in Somalia, they never fed me enough, and somebody just let it slide to feed the hostage breakfast on a certain morning. I made sure that I turned it around, and in the language, the pigeon the we spoke the word chum-chum meant food or eat. I told them, "Michael no chum-chum, Michael no chum-chum," which means if Michael can't eat, Michael won't eat. All of a sudden I was on a hunger strike because they weren't feeding me, and they got all agitated again and they brought me food, and then I was okay. That was how I made sure they fed me instead of just acting like negligent daily, which is what they were sometimes.

Michael: But at another point, one of the guards actually injured me, twice actually, and in both cases I protested with hunger strikes. Those were more difficult, those lasts a while, and those went up to the boss, and I knew the boss was involved and upset at me, and that could have been very bad. One of them lasted almost a week. I cheated, I ate in the meantime, and found ways to get food or go off the strike for a few hours or whatever, but I wound up not getting anything except some help from a doctor at some point.

Dave: What's your relationship with food right now?

Michael: Well, it's much better. I'm a good cook. Before I was in Somalia I don't think I was a very creative cook, but while I was there all I could think about for part of the day was what I wanted to eat. At some point when I got my hands on a notebook one of the first things I wrote down, aside from some stories in my head were recipes. I wrote down recipes I'd never even bothered to cook for myself, recipes I was thinking I might like, and in some cases I got all the ingredients right, including for a kidney stew I'd had once in Britain. I was surprised that was from a few years earlier, and it was just an intense craving for iron and protein. Now I make that kidney stew for myself, but it was straight from that recipe that I wrote down in the notebook. It was accurate.

Dave: Do you still eat beans?

Michael: Sure. Well, yes, but not like that. These are very local beans in Somalia, sort of brown beans, and there was never any salt involved, it was just beans, and sometimes beans with sugar if I wanted to put that down on in the morning. I don't need to eat that. I don't need to eat that anymore. I don't need to eat boiled goat, at least with no seasoning, and I don't need to eat canned tuna ever in my life.

Dave: I can respect that. Now do you ever practice fasting, intermittent fasting?

Michael: No.

Dave: No. You probably never want to. I was guessing that was going to be your answer. I had to check. Now talk about tolerance, are you more tolerant of people and their misbehaviors, the things they do that you don't like or you're less tolerant after this experience?

Michael: That's a good question. I think I'm pretty good at seeing some people's bullshit. I don't necessarily put up with that from strangers or whatever else, but I don't have a whole lot of people immediately around me who are acting in weird ways, but I also don't freak out. In other words, I learned to handle it quietly, which is normally pretty good. As far as tolerance of strangers and immigrants, one thing that was clear while I was in Somalia was that some of my private guards wanted to move to Europe. They wanted to get on a boat from Libya and cross the Mediterranean, and in the meantime I'd written about that migrant trail, where it turns out some pirate bosses are actually financiers in East Africa.

Michael: When I got back you'd think, "Okay, well, Michael doesn't want any Muslims of any kind in Europe," but that's not quite true. I know too many Somalis to feel that way, and I think that process of forgiveness taught me something about good and evil that makes it impossible for me to think of one group of people as good or evil. That's just not how it works, if anything that ... Although, I'm wary about Islam in the West and that kind of thing, that process of forgiveness actually deepened my tolerance for strangers.

Dave: If you had an opportunity to be face to face in a room with your captors, in a safe room in the West, would you take it?

Michael: Maybe, yeah.

Dave: Maybe. What would you say?

Michael: Well, one thing they did was they always brought, no matter what we ran out of, food-wise, for some reason they always had biscuits and mango juice, I might give them a bottle of mango juice, not as forgiveness, but just-

Dave: Sort of like, "Here, have some more of this."

Michael: I'm assuming if I met him he would be in jail.

Dave: He might want some because he's eating prison chow.

Michael: He might need a bottle of mango juice.

Dave: That is a fantastic answer. Did you laugh when you were a captor?

Michael: Yes, only a few times, but there were a few moments where I laughed out loud. I think that's important to say, that even a situation like that is not 100% awful, which is another way of saying, "You can't spend 24 hours a day angry." The one thing I tried to capture in *The Desert and the Sea* were the vagaries, especially the emotional vagaries of a situation like that. One thing I've talked about before, but I didn't put in the book, simply because it didn't fit or it belonged, it would have been too much with the diversion, was a story I heard on the BBC around New Year's Eve 2013, about a great big rubber ducky in a harbor in Taiwan, that was being used for a New Year's celebration or something, except it got attacked by birds and exploded. All I could imagine was eagles or something like that, they're very territorial about this enormous bird, and the surprise they must have felt when they attacked it, and it just blew up in their faces. That made me laugh out loud while I was just sitting under my mosquito tent listening to my shortwave radio.

Dave: Actually that visual is making me laugh right now. I have bald eagles circling, I'm outside my window right now and they do get pretty pissed off sometimes. I could see those.

Michael: I think in real life. I've looked it up in the meantime, it probably exploded because of the weather, because if you look at pictures there are no birds in the pictures. Either they flew away really fast or the story the way I heard it was funnier in Somalia than it was in real life. That tells you how much is mental.

Dave: Did they give you the shortwave radio just for entertainment purposes? It seems almost like a luxury item?

Michael: It was. I keep asking for it over several months. I think I had one early on, and then when they put us on the fishing vessel in April, in 2012, they took it away, they confiscated it. Then I spent about a year and a half with no news at all, nothing from the outside world, except the occasional phone call to my family. When I was back on land, and in that series of prison houses I think I started to ask over and over for a shortwave, and finally the boss gave me a battered one, an old one. It's a piece of crap, but it really helped. It was not just for entertainment purposes, it was definitely a distraction, but it really helped to hear news from the outside world, and it turned out that after almost a year of listening to it before I got out, I was pretty up on the news. [Inaudible 00:38:04] service, only half an hour, maybe two and half hours a day, it kept me pretty well-versed.

Dave: You felt at least connected to the outside world even though you weren't in it.

Michael: Exactly, a little bit connected. When I got back there wasn't a complete Rip Van Winkle effect. It still have that year and a half in the middle where I had no news, and I'm still learning about things that went on then, and the people who died. That will probably go on for the rest of my life.

Dave: It's like a big gap in the middle there. There was a time that when you decided you were going to escape you've been a captive for a while, you're going to jump off of the ship, walk me through what was going on in your mind. How long did it take to get there?

Michael: Well, the ship was a tuna vessel, and it was about 50 meters long, and industrial tuna vessel, not a troller, but a long-liner. As soon as they put me onboard I wanted to jump off it, I'm a surfer, it didn't seem like a difficult thing. We were only anchored about a mile from shore, and it always seemed reasonable for me to swim to shore. It's just a question of how many times I would get shot. I didn't do it obviously for very good reasons, but a couple of times a Western helicopter came and visited the ship, it circled around, and I thought, "Maybe I should jump now." In retrospect it's probably good that I didn't under those occasions because there were armed men in those helicopters, and there was a tensed standoff between the pirates, who immediately grabbed their weapons, and the sniper, if not more than one gunman onboard the helicopter. There would have been an exchange of gunfire probably if I'd broken that.

Michael: These were things going through my head until one day, at the very end of the summer in 2012, when the anchor chain broke on that vessel, [inaudible 00:40:04]. All of a sudden we were freely drifting on this powerful current that was going Northwards along the Somali Coast, and the ship had actually started to turn this enormous 50 meter vessel, turning in the water. I almost jumped in, but the crew got the ship under control, and the pirates put me in a cabin. Once the ship was actually trundling, I think to the South, and heading for some new destination, all that was going through my mind was that the pirates were going to put us on shore again. I had spent enough time on shore beforehand, about three months that I knew I didn't want to go back. I also knew that we were being watched. I knew that there was Western surveillance watching the ship, not just from the helicopters, but also drones I'd seen, and the plane that came to see the ship as soon as the anchor chain had broken.

Michael: I thought there might be some sort of rapid response if I jump. I was also fairly desperate. That night while the ship was still moving from one point to the coast to another, I found an excuse involving toilet paper to get down to the lower deck. The Somali who took me out for this little errand didn't have a weapon, and I thought, "Okay, now is my chance." I took a running leap to the side of the ship, and I dove into the water.

Michael: Immediately obviously I was frightened, because I thought I was going to get shot. No Somali fired his gun, and I got free off the ship and head away from the ship fairly quickly because I read the current, I could tell which way the swell was going, but I was moving at an angle to the shore. I didn't expect the ship to turn around because the motor didn't sound too good, and I thought it was not in very good condition to pull a maneuver like that. I thought I would either float there until some helicopter found me or I would swim to shore. Instead the ship started to come back on that current that I had swam out with, and started rolling back towards me on these swells at night.

Dave: Oh no.

Michael: Eventually the ship would roll over me with barnacles on the bottom and everything like that, so I had to give up. If I had been convinced that somebody was already on ... the helicopter's on its way to get me or whatever I would have evaded, but they probably would have started shooting at that point.

Dave: What happened when you got pulled back in? What happened mentally?

Michael: The crew threw a lifesaver to me and pulled me up the side of the ship, and then the pirates were pissed off. The pirates were pretty angry, and they put me in my cabin, and I had to stay there. A pirate boss, the next morning came in, and gave me a beating, but they asked me why I had done it, and I had no alibi. I was ready to just be off the ship, and drown myself if necessary. I thought that was just going to be the end one way or the other, but they have threatened to sell me to Al-Shabaab a few months before, and I said I was afraid of going on land and getting sold to Al-Shabaab. I figured if the pirates are going to make stupid threats like that to me, even a few months earlier they could damn well do it again. That turned out to be not about alibi.

Michael: In fact what happened after that was the pirates, they kept me in this solitary confinement in the cabin on the ship for about three weeks, and then brought me on the shore. All of a sudden I was in the hands of another half of the pirate gang, a slightly different group within the same gang, and only then did negotiations start. This was months into my captivity, and the pirates had been hanging on to a demand of \$20 million, almost through September, which was insane to me. From phone calls on the ship I knew that negotiations were going nowhere. This new group on land, they began to negotiate, very slowly but at least they started.

Dave: Now the US and Britain have a really strict no concession policy, probably the strictest in the world, they're just not going to pay pirates or hostage-takers at all. What happened?

Michael: My mother had to raise money with help of some ... from some magazines I'd worked for, and a couple of other institutions. She was the voice on the phone. She was the person who talked the pirates down from this absurd \$20 million figure to \$1.6 million, and in the end that's what was paid. Someone brought \$1.6 million bucks in cash to Somalia, and a couple of hours later I was driven out of the prison house, and delivered to a bush pilot, to a plane that had come to land in Galkayo.

Dave: Are you concerned that, that will lead to more hostage-taking?

Michael: Yes, I'm concerned that any of that money that flows to a criminal organization will be used for more criminality. By that point the piracy of Somalia had fallen off. I learned that on the radio, while I was lying there and I felt really stupid for having gone there to write a book about piracy, and then have it end essentially while I was there. But it's not completely over, the gang is still together, and that money has probably been used for, if not hostage-taking then maybe gun smuggling or drug smuggling, whatever else the gangs get into, including people smuggling by the way towards Libya. But one thing I have to say is that two days after I got out, those two halves of the pirate gang got together to argue about the money, and there was a shootout. Five top ranking pirates, including three bosses, three top bosses killed each other. The money went to a couple of people who survived, and they certainly don't deserve it.

Dave: Did you feel the sense of mirth that I just felt when you heard that the ...

Michael: Well, at that point I was this recovering hostage on my second day in Nairobi when I first heard about that. It was disbelief, my jaw just sort of dropped, but I had spent a lot of time sitting there wondering how it would feel. A SEAL Team came blasting in and killed all these guards, who were the low ranking pirates on the totem pole, and some of whom I'd gotten to know, and liked a little bit, how would I feel? The best case scenario in a rescue would have been Mike gets rescued alive, and all these guys that I just got to know are dead. That would have happened no matter what, then you're not even definite that Mike would be alive. The way it turned out was like five of the guys who richly deserved it killed each other, that did strike me as a form of justice.

Dave: A little bit of karma, they earned it.

Michael: Definitely. They earned it, and they inflicted it on themselves.

Dave: You've talked about real human freedom, and the thinking skills that changed your approach towards any problem, what does that mean to you?

Michael: Well, what I mentioned about Epictetus saying that the rearrangement of your mind, so that you are not worried too much about what other people are doing, and more about what you're doing, and the way you're thinking unfolds. That's the main thing you have control over, and that's true whether you're a rich executive or a prisoner somewhere. This is the most important, and most immediate kind of human freedom, and it can change any problem almost immediately, because it changes your mental orientation towards it.

Dave: For the people listening to the show, how would you suggest that they tap into that ability? You went through an incredible crucible to learn how to do it, but most of us never will.

Michael: Right, no, you have to sit and think about it as a problem of your own thinking, and what you can do to actually change, and even simplify the problem, no matter what it is you're sitting or facing. I think what helps people in just everyday business is this Stoic idea that you can't actually change. You have only so much control over an outcome, you can't sit there thinking, "My life is going to be miserable if the outcome is like this." But you can adjust exactly how you deal with the problem, and how you think about it.

Dave: You've talked about gratitude, you've talked about forgiveness, do you have a sense of gratitude towards the experience of being kidnapped and held hostage?

Michael: That's a good question. A sense of gratitude to the actual experience, I came out feeling a sense of gratitude just to be alive, and I still go back to that when I need to. In other words, I have this incredible well of horrible experiences that I can draw on to feel that sense of gratitude again. Gratitude for the experience itself, it's a good question, probably not yet.

Dave: It's okay to say no.

Michael: I know that Solzhenitsyn after he'd written quite a bit about his time in the Gulag, expressed gratitude for his jailers, and for the whole experience, I'm not sure I'm there yet.

Dave: Do you want to be there?

Michael: Maybe, we'll see what it requires.

Dave: That's a very honest answer. Mike, if someone came to you tomorrow and said, based on all of your experiences as a reporter, as a human, and certainly having been a hostage, and they said like, "I want to learn how to perform better at everything that I do as a human being," what would your three most important pieces of advice be for them?

Michael: Three, well, the first thing would be to learn how to live in the moment, and deal with what's right in front of you, because the next day is unpredictable, and the previous day is gone. There is something about just dealing with the task in front of you that's all important. Something about that mental re-orientation that I said, and what Epictetus calls the only real freedom we have is very important because then you actually can adjust your own approach and your own thinking about the problem in front of you. A third thing, I'm not sure.

Dave: Do you call yourself a Stoic?

Michael: Yeah. I can call myself Stoic without anyone in sort of a Pope role arguing with me. I find a lot of wisdom by reading Stoics, yes, but again, that's not the only discipline I look at.

Dave: Mike, it's been an honor to interview you, and to hear about your experience, and thanks for sharing all the details, and the hard stuff. It's remarkable what you learned from it, and you're carrying that with you.

Michael: Thank you, Dave. Thanks for the discussion.

Dave: If you liked today's interview you really ought to read Michael Scott Moore's book. Go to [radiofreemike.net](http://radiofreemike.net), that's his website, and the title of his book is-

Michael: The Desert and the Sea.

Dave: There's a whole long title after that, The Desert and the Sea: 977 Days Captive on the Somali Pirate Coast, but if you remember The Desert and the Sea, and Michael Scott Moore you'll find it. It's a profound read, and just having heard this interview I think you know that there's more going on here than, "I had a tough experience." There's a lot of introspection, and things to learn about being a human being from Michael. Thanks again.