

Why You Have to Heal Your Trauma to Free Your Energy – Tana Amen with Dave Asprey – #800

Announcer:

Bulletproof Radio, the State of High Performance.

Dave Asprey:

You're listening to Bulletproof Radio with Dave Asprey. Today, we're going to talk about the F word. No, not the fun F word that you thought I was talking about. You guys know my three F words by now if you've read *Fast This Way*, and this has come from years of just trying to understand why people do what they do and the first F word that drives us and drives all life forms is fear. And this is just our bodies trying to keep our meat safe from predators without our bodies really understanding that we're in there. And in fact, our body doesn't really care that much.

And what that means is that things that happen to us that are called trauma, set up our automatic reactions, automatic negative thoughts and things like that. And it's one of the things if you hack it, you get so much energy back because every electron you make goes somewhere in your body or your brain or your mind. And if a huge number of electrons are going into useless thoughts that are sabotaging you, you're wasting your precious energy. And that's why trauma has been such a hard to talk about, but powerful thing because most people will say, "I don't have any trauma. I'm an adult and nothing that bad happened."

However, trauma is an automatic pattern that is designed to be invisible for you. So I have a really special guest on today. And if you're saying, "Dave, I don't believe you." There's been several really good episodes we talked about this. A while ago, I shared about my work with Amen Clinics. We've had Dr. Daniel Brown talk about early childhood attachment disorders which was incredible and Dr. David Rabin talking about touch and breath work and psychedelics and Dr. Rachel Yehuda. So this is an ongoing theme for Bulletproof Radio where I'm going to talk about fear, and things like fasting.

Some of these are frankly unpleasant, but if you want to hack yourself, these are the things that suck the most energy that you don't know are doing it. And that's it, if you don't have enough core energy because you really are insulin resistant and your brain doesn't work, you've got to fix that too. But these are all part of biohacking and that's why I'm recording this episode today that I think you're really, really going to like and our episode guest is a three-time cancer survivor and someone who's been through a huge amount of trauma and has never talked about it and someone who's a New York Times best-selling author and vice president of the Amen Clinics, a neurosurgical ICU trauma nurse and a health and fitness expert, as well. And I'm talking about Tana Amen who is Dr. Amen's partner and wife. Tana, welcome to the show.

Tana Amen:

Oh, thanks Dave. Love being here with you.

Dave:

There's a lot more to you than I knew, I've known you for years. You and Dr. Amen are friends. I didn't know that you had a secondary black belt in Kempo and a black belt in Taekwondo and you're full of grit. You walk around looking all Hollywood and beautiful and socialite, but you're a badass.

Tana: Thank you. Yes. Yeah, there's a reason for that. I practice karate, not dance. I love going to the range and not to hit golf balls. So yeah, there's a reason for those things.

Dave:

Is that because you are compensating for a shocking amount of trauma in your life?

Tana:

Yeah, so I grew up ... It's funny that you say that you mentioned the socialite, and how I look and for a long time I use that as a facade. It was a way to keep people away, so they wouldn't see ... I was overcompensating if you will. It's like if I accomplish enough, if I look good enough, if I have enough makeup on or the right clothes, people won't see how broken I am, they won't see how really screwed up I am inside. But when I was really young, all my early childhood memories. I remember when I met my husband, Daniel, we were first dating and he's like, "Well, tell me some of the good memories from when you were a kid."

And I'm like, "Honestly, I don't remember any. I remember almost drowning when I was two. I remember my uncle being murdered when I was four. I remember waking up and being alone, again, when I was two, no one was there. I was just left." And I could go on and on, but I couldn't really think of any good memories. And I remember my dad leaving, it was just a lot of trauma. My uncle was a heroin addict and then there was sexual trauma in my adolescence. And so those are early memories.

The job for children is to be able to explore the world, to figure out who they're going to be and know that the world is a safe place, but it wasn't a safe place. So for some of us, that's just not the truth. And so you start to go inside and hide and you're looking for other ways to control your environment and for me, that ended up being sadly an eating disorder. And of course, that was gross, that was weird. And so there was no way I was going to tell anybody. So I just buttoned that up and built this wall, this facade, so I couldn't let people know me for real because they wouldn't love me.

Dave:

You tell all of your stories in your new book, *The Relentless Courage of a Scared Child* which in and of itself is a pretty courageous title. But you wrote a book about grit. How many people do you think are out there with a similar amount of trauma who just don't show anything but are still holding it inside?

Tana:

Oh, so many. And I know this, not only because of our clinics, but that's really ... I spend most of my day reading these ... Just when I look at the comments I get on social media and not just mine, but Daniel's and all the people that we talked to. There are so many people, and not just women, so many people in general that have trauma and I used to hate that word. I love what you said when we first started the show, I hated the word trauma. I wouldn't address some of these things because it made me feel weak. It made me feel like a victim and I survived by not being a victim.

So I just kept shoving it down, only I was doing things like throwing up. So that wasn't working out so well. But the word trauma made me feel like a victim. And now that I'm older, wiser, went through the healing process, the truth is you can be victimized and not live your life as a victim, just because I was victimized as a child does not mean I am a victim now and that's part of why I do things that I think symbolically remind me of that like martial arts, it's important to me. It's important to me to remind myself, "I am kind of a badass, I've survived a lot and I've thrived through all of that."

So rather than post-traumatic stress, we like to talk about post-traumatic growth. So some people have post-traumatic stress, but there are a subset of people who when you put them in really traumatic environments, they will come out stronger on the other end.

Dave:

Scott Barry Kaufman from Columbia came on recently, and he talked about victim narcissism as a new type of narcissism that's out there where people are saying, "Well, I suffered, therefore I deserve." And your book is the opposite of that. Grandiose narcissism is I am so good, therefore I deserve, and both of those are very harmful behavior patterns that you can learn. But your book is like, "Yeah, I suffered, and then I worked really freaking hard and you deserve because of what you did." Which is really cool. It's how you respond to the environment that that shows grit which is why I thought your book was really interesting.

Tana:

So I have so many family members who fit into that category. I've never heard that term. I love the term you just used. I love that. Can you say that again?

Dave:

Victim narcissism or suffering narcissism.

Tana:

Oh, I love that.

Dave:

It was a powerful [crosstalk 00:08:03].

Tana:

Yeah, who think that they just deserve to be taken care of just because, and I'm like, "My mom was a 16-year-old runaway, lived on the streets, literally lived on the streets, never finished high school, and ended up retiring one of the super wealthy." Because that woman's got grit in excess. And I know I got that from her, but she never ever took no for an answer. She never behaved like a victim and we went through hell and back. But it was like, "It doesn't matter. You just keep getting up and you keep doing it over."

Dave:

If you're listening to the show right now and you're thinking, "What the heck? There are a good number of people listening right now who have similar circumstances." I want you guys to see, Tana, she worked with Dr. Amen and Dr. Oz on the Daniel Plan. And you guys have had a huge impact on the world of brain science, on helping millions of people change their nutrition, and you're successful in every measure of success. And yet, if you're 25, and you're going, "What the heck is going on?" It is exceptionally common when you're in your 20s even if you didn't have nearly as much trauma as you did.

I had a lot of bullying and I had some birth trauma. I had no idea it made any difference in my life, but when I was at Amen Clinics, to this day, if you show me pictures of smiley people and angry people, I identify the angry people three times as fast as the happy people. And that's a sign of trauma.

Tana:

Me too.

Dave:

You too, right?

Tana:

Yeah.

Dave:

So this isn't trauma-

Tana:

[crosstalk 00:09:34] survival.

Dave:

Yeah, it's survival. It's because my network was wired to be ready to handle threats faster and better than the average person and it might be a strength. Do you think it is?

Tana:

To some degree is ... So I remember it's funny that you brought that up because you came to our clinic and that's where you learned that. So I remember when they were developing that tool, and my husband actually wanted me to use it because he knew what was going to happen. So of course I noticed all the negative faces and the scary faces and the terrorist faces and all this. And he's like, "We need to work on this, this tool is going to help you notice all the happy faces."

I'm like, "Why the hell would I want to do that? That's not going to keep me alive. What are you talking about?" I was attacked when I was 15 by some dude behind me, some big dude in a suit, I don't want to notice the happy faces, I want to notice the ones that are going to attack me. And we do that out of survival. What that tool is for is to help you begin ... You're not going to lose that, but you do want to start to notice the happy things and the good things around you, that positivity, bias training is really important. It doesn't mean we have to lose our survival skills. But I just remember when they were developing that, it just reminded me when you said that, it was so funny.

Dave:

It was actually really eye opening for me because I've done a lot of we'll call it trauma healing. And okay, when I say that, I still throw up in my mouth a little bit. Trauma healing? "Okay, I'm a 6'4 dude, I can take on most people just by nature of who I am. I can take them on intellectually or even physically, unless there's some kind of a trained fighter or they're better armed than I am." Right? Mostly that's physics because I'm big, right? But I also know, I know how to take care of myself, and that's fine.

So I don't walk in fear, I don't think about that stuff. It's not a part of my life, I don't worry about it. That said, when I walk into a room, do I know all the potential threats? Yeah, it's built in. It's automatic. And it's the same thing that Navy SEALs are trained to do. Not that I'm anywhere near a Navy SEAL level, but it's that you scan the room and you're like, "All right, fine." But I don't dwell on it. But I didn't recognize, oh, not everyone has that. And that that is in part, it's automated system protection, and it's the automated nature of it.

So when I say I've healed trauma, what that means is I stopped recognizing things as threats that weren't actually threats. And that's what trauma healing is actually about. And when you stop recognizing a threat, you stop going into fear, and then you stop wasting electrons that ought to be

going into folding proteins or thinking about good stuff. And so when I say healing trauma, that's what I'm talking about, but I feel like those words are so, they're so stigmatized. Is there a better word than trauma?

Tana:

So I like the definition that I found of trauma because it really helps you process it differently. I hated that word and I remember when I started therapy, to unpack this a little. She's like, "Well, tell me about when you were molested." I'm like, "I wasn't molested." She's like, "You told me your stepdad climbed in bed with you and did all these things." I'm like, "Yeah, but other people have had it worse." Like I could not say the words. And so I couldn't say trauma, I couldn't say molested, I couldn't say these things that had happened because I survived by not thinking that way. But when you take the word trauma, and you actually think of the definition, really what it is, it's any event or set of events that occurred in your life that made you think the world was unsafe, that broke your trust in people that you're surrounded by, that really caused you to just not trust. And so if you think of it that way, okay, that's easier to digest for me. For me, that was easier to digest.

Dave:

Yeah.

Tana:

Okay, a lot of things have happened in my life. I don't need to think of myself as a traumatized person. But that's what trauma is.

Dave:

I like that way of thinking about it. And it means that you have buttons that can be pushed by other people or things that you don't want. One of the traumas, when we talked about trust, one of the very interesting traumas for me that I had totally forgotten about and this is nothing usually don't even think about them is that when I was in something like first grade, one kid did something and I told the teacher because it was like a destructive thing. And then the kid goes, "Oh no, Dave did it." And then I got punished for someone else doing the wrong thing even though I did the right thing.

Okay, and so I had forgotten about it. But it was one of things where I don't feel safe because an authority figure, a teacher punished me for doing the right thing. And this is, "Is that really trauma Dave? Are you still thinking about this?" No. I didn't think about it for 30 years, but then I go on The Joe Rogan Show and I share really good science, I'm just helping people. And I've already helped people a lot with my content. And when Joe Rogan had a financial interest in a competitor, he came after my reputation, attacked me relentlessly for 18 months. And meanwhile, I have all these emails from him, just all this weird stuff that he couldn't even do but what it had done is it pushed that button that I did the right thing, I came on, I shared good knowledge, I know Bulletproof Coffee changes brain because he said it hundreds of times without me paying him.

But then once he was selling another brand, it was like, "Dave's a jerk and he lied." And that pushed that trauma button for me. And I was like, "What do I do?" And it goes to that fight, flight or freeze kind of thing and I'm like, "I want to go after it." But I was like, "No, I'm going to just keep talking about science." But it was really stressful. And so, "Oh my God, I'm going to do some neurofeedback." Fortunately, I own a neurofeedback company and I went in and suddenly, this old memory popped in my head, I'm like, "Wait a minute, that's so stupid." And then once I edited that trauma experience so I didn't react to it anymore, I was like, "Wait a minute, every time he says I'm a jerk, I sell more coffee."

This is the actual real. Everything was, "Dave Asprey is a bad man." I'm like, "Say it again, say it again." Right? But it was so, I went through eight months of hell not recognizing that an old trauma button I had forgotten about was getting pushed by an adult bully.

Tana:

And that's really what we refer to as PTSD. That's PTSD. You don't notice, you don't recognize why, but something happens in the present and you don't know why you're reacting always. Sometimes you do know, but usually you don't know. And you're like, "What is going on?" So what we want to do is identify, "Am I really reacting because of now or am I reacting because of something in the past?" And neurofeedback is brilliant. We love neurofeedback. So neurofeedback, something called EMDR which is a form of therapy which obviously takes a little longer.

Dave:

I did that too. Yeah.

Tana:

Yeah, it's a good form of therapy, that's what I did. But we have a lot of our patients do neurofeedback because it's just brilliant. So that's actually a really good point that you make because we often are reacting to the past and I love something else you pointed out, you pointed out your electrons and why trauma, why it's important to heal from the past trauma because it's really wasting your body's energy on something that's not helping you with your health. And so I remember when I met my husband when we were having these conversations, and I'm like this badass hard-charging ICU trauma nurse.

I would not work with patients who are walkie talkies, I wanted them sedated, intubated, blood, guts [inaudible 00:16:41]. Let's not talk, let's just get this done. I want cracked skulls, that kind of thing. He's the warm and fuzzy, "Let's talk this through." And so he starts talking to me, I'm like, "Oh, my God, don't shrink me in no psychobabble. I don't want to hear this." Because that was just how I was and I know that part of that was my reaction to not wanting people to get close to me. It was really my reaction to keep people from knowing me.

Dave:

I can't imagine you that way. You've done so much healing because you're kind, you're open, you're a good person, I've spent plenty of time with you. So you've transformed dramatically. I was a pretty big jerk when I was younger, but I think your orders of magnitude more than that. So it's very hard to imagine and I want everyone listening. If you're like, "I have all these dark thoughts or voices in my head." All that stuff. We have a poster child here for how far you can go.

Tana:

Yeah, I really do feel like I've come a long way. But my first gift from Daniel was 10 sessions of EMDR. And I'm like, "Who would give someone a gift of therapy?" Except a shrink, who would give someone a gift of therapy? I remember that. And I remember him talking to me about some of these early memories and he's like, he made this connection. He said, "So you remember the day vividly that your uncle was murdered in a drug deal gone wrong when you were four. And two weeks later you were in the hospital at four years old. You were in the hospital for upper and lower GIs?" And I'm like, "Yeah, so?"

And he's like, "Well, don't you think those are connected?" And I'm like, "Oh my God, here we go again." Those psychobabble. I was like, "No, they're not connected." And of course they weren't connected. I was one of those frequent fliers at the hospital, I was on antibiotics all the time for unexplainable things, high fevers. Yeah, high fevers, I've had 10 Medical surgeries, diagnosed with cancer when I was 23 that kept coming back. So to think that our trauma doesn't have an effect on our body, I just I want to really point out what you said because it's important.

When we don't heal from trauma, all of that energy is stuck and it's focused on the wrong things. You're stuck in this flight or fight thing. You're stuck in this mode of like, "I need to survive." As opposed to, "I need to just thrive and heal and live life." You can't do that. And that's one of the really big reasons to do it.

Dave:

I've had a person really close to me who said, "You should do my 40 years of Zen thing. You're going to look at all these thoughts and maybe go in and edit once a month." And the answer was, "No, I might not like what I'd find if I look in there." How often do you see that?

Tana:

So they're afraid of one of two things, it's going to be so bad that we can't help them or worse, the worst one is I'm afraid that nothing is wrong with my brain and it's just my fault. But people are afraid and I'm like, "Why would you not want to know?" But then I remember a time when I didn't want to know. So I try to remember that and have empathy. Now it's like, "Bring it, just bring it on. I want to know everything, I want to do everything. I'm like you." You are jump the canyon kind of guy, you're extreme, I love your posts. They crack me up, but you're an extreme guy and I'm like that.

My husband are very Yin and Yang. He's the Yin to my Yang, but I always want to like jump in and know as much as I can, do as much as I can. Once I opened that door which was hard to open, but once that door was open, it's like, "Well, let's go. Let's do this. Let's get through it, get to the other side of the icky stuff so I can get to the good stuff."

Dave:

I am forever grateful for the work that you and Dr. Amen have done at Amen Clinics because when I was late 20's, maybe 29, 30, I read the first book that he'd written, did you guys co-author that together?

Tana:

No, no, no, that was actually probably ... Was that Change Your Brain, Change Your Life?

Dave:

Yeah.

Tana:

That was before I met him.

Dave:

Okay. So that book, I was like, "I have to go get a brain scan." And I got a brain scan and I'll never forget the doctor who was doing it up in the Bay Area thought I was trying to get Adderall because I was in business school. And I'm like, "I'm failing, I must be stupid and all these other people in class are smarter

than me." And when he got the brain scan results, I walked back into his office and he goes, "Inside your brain is total chaos. I don't know how you're standing here in front of me, you have the best camouflage I've ever seen."

And I'm like, "That's that grit thing." Where like, "You can have garbage." And for me, it was a massive relief. I have a hardware problem. There's parts of my brain that have no metabolic activity, and there's big holes. And when you guys at the clinics saw my brain scan, you're like, "This is the brain of someone who lives under a bridge doing street drugs, you have chemically induced brain damage from toxic mold." And I'm like, "Oh thank God, it's not just that I'm stupid, it's not just that I'm weak."

Okay, guys, I'd already made in last \$6 million at this point, my career is like on fire. I'm going to freaking Wharton, one of the top schools out there. But the voice in my head is very different and some of that's trauma based. And that said, even if you have a no brain metabolic problems, but you have a lot of trauma, what happens?

Tana:

If you've got no-

Dave:

No, your brain is working metabolically, but you have a lot of trauma. What does that look like?

Tana:

Totally. So what happens in that case is so there's a difference between physical trauma like a head injury and emotional trauma. So if you have physical trauma, what it tends to do, that's the holes you're talking about, that can cause that. So lots of things can cause low blood flow. One of them is head trauma. So if you hit your head, it causes low blood flow, it looks like a hole, what it really is lack of blood flow. It's decreased blood flow. So if you have emotional trauma like when he looked at my brain scan, I had a dent in the front from where I had a head injury because he kept asking me if you had a head injury, and I'm like, "No, because I'm a trauma nurse. I was an ICU neurosurgical ICU nurse."

I'm like, "To me, that means your skull is cracked open, and you've got a drain in your brain." So I'm like, "I've never had a head injury." But you could actually see just from something as simple as a car accident that I walked away from, you could see where I had hit my head. And so I'm like, "That's so interesting." I was fascinated by that, but what was really even more interesting was the emotional part of my brain on fire, it's on fire, it was bright red. And it's supposed to have a little bit of activity, and mine was it does a triangle pattern, a diamond pattern rather. And if you have the diamond pattern, that is a sign of PTSD or emotional trauma. For some reason, your emotional brain is just fired up.

Dave:

So you can see it-

Tana:

By the way, mold can do that too.

Dave:

Yeah. Well, mold is a form of trauma too. If you're getting chronically poisoned by the place where you sleep, your body's like, "Something's attacking me, I know what it is, but I'm ready to fight." And that's why a lot of people act like jerks when they're on molds, especially me.

Tana:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave:

Now, one thing that I do is I find when we're taking clients through 40 years of Zen, a five day intense neurofeedback program, almost everyone says I've never hit my head, but were, "Your electrical signals look like it hit your head." And then you ask them 10 times and then they say, "Oh actually, that's right. I was unconscious for three days." "Yeah, that time." But the ones like those, we refer them to go to Amen Clinics and get a SPECT scan because it's like, "Oh, there's stuff to do." And then on the electrical side and most of what ... 60% of what we're doing there is turning off old traumas so that you can perform better because trauma release is a performance enhancer in every human there ever was and there is no human that wasn't traumatized. It's just a question of degree and type. Do you agree with that statement?

Tana:

100%. I think most people have been traumatized, how we handle it is so different as humans, but I love what you said about the head injuries because we ask people over and over, this happened to my own mother. I warned her before she went in. He's going to ask you about all the times you hit your head which are numerous. My mother is the poster child for ADD, she's super successful, she's super bright, but she's very scattered. And so I'm like, "He's going to ask you about all the times you hit your head, please tell him." Even though they may not seem important to you.

She goes in and he asked her, she's like, "I've never had a head injury." I'm like, "Oh my god, I literally had to call him." I go, "She's lying to you. She's lying to you." He goes, "What do you mean she's lying to me?" I go, "Well, she fell off of a high dive when she was a kid and missed the pool, she landed on the concrete." I had to go through all these ... People forget and they don't those things matter because they lived through it or because they didn't lose consciousness. Just because you don't lose consciousness does not mean your brain wasn't affected.

While we're on the topic of what things that affect your brain like you talking about mold, and that's just so interesting. Things like hormones, and all those things matter as well. I knew you and I were talking a little bit off camera about perimenopause makes a huge difference and for me when I was in my 20s is one of the things I write about my new book is I went through thyroid cancer, and no one really warned me what was going to happen and I went into a wicked depression because I did not know that just the thyroid cancer itself was going to be a problem in the treatment that I went through, they took me off of all of my medication, I had no thyroid in my system.

And then there's the anesthesia and then there's the psychological component to it and I went into this wicked depression. And it was the first time I actually had the thought, life is not supposed to be this hard, there's no point. And so we always want to be paying attention to all of those things when you're talking about your brain, and then the flip side of that is I was put onto a medication that wasn't good for my brain to pull me out of the depression. And let's just say it was not good for my brain. I became dangerously impulsive.

So I went from being overly anxious to dangerously impulsive and it could have ruined my life. So these are all the things at the clinics that we want to talk about with people that we want to make sure we assess all of that, because you are not the sum of one thing in your life, right? What's happening in your brain is the sum of all things that are going on with you. Your biology, your psychology, your social circle, who you're hanging out with and your spiritual circle, what gives your life meaning and purpose. So we need to look at all of that and not just from right now, but throughout your life.

Dave:

Well, let's talk a little bit about your spiritual circle because one of the other things that Scott Barry Kaufman shared was the Hierarchy of Needs, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs. He's studied everything Maslow ever wrote that wasn't published and became an expert on it. And Maslow was about to publish the final step on his Hierarchy of Needs which was for transcendence where there's actually a basic drive for humans to be happy, they have to have some way to do that. And that gets into spiritual realms when you do it and some of the most impactful healing and just important things, my life has been on the spiritual realms, and you write in your book about how faith is important in healing trauma. Talk to me about faith and trauma.

Tana:

So I understand that people listening right now are coming from all different walks of life. You have to understand what spirituality means to you because there are some people who they may not have the same belief system I have. For me, spirituality is God, and it's about prayer and meditation and that really, but it's really about believing in something bigger than yourself. And it takes the focus off of you, and puts it on something larger than yourself. And one question I like to ask myself when I start to get stuck on the small things in my life that are bothering me is, "Does this have eternal value? Why is the world a better place? Because I breathe."

So it takes it off of me and puts the responsibility on me to think of others or to think of what's bigger than myself. And for me, that is God. For me, that is prayer, it's meditation. Those things helped me to get out of that place in my head. But it really did pull me out of a dark, deep, dark, ugly place when I was able to recognize that the world is so much bigger than this one little place that I'm stuck in.

Dave:

I like that. And I do believe that all of the neuroscience research I've seen, both from you guys, and just other experts I've interacted with on the show is that having some sense of mission and a sense of there's something bigger than me, it puts you in a flow state. It makes everything easier and apparently, it makes healing from a trauma easier which is new information.

Tana:

And one of the best things you can do is help other people. So just having that sense of purpose is sometimes that's the thing you start with is like, "I just need to go help someone else to take me out of my own negativity."

Dave:

Is this why most therapists are so traumatized?

Tana:

Yeah, I think a lot of people go into that field because of that, honestly, I do. Yeah.

Dave:

And that's not a dig on therapists like, "Hey, if you've lived it, you can probably fix it better than someone's like, I don't know what you're talking about, but here's the steps." Color by numbers isn't so good. I'd rather have a doctor who was really sick for a while than a doctor who's at perfect health and has never been fat.

Tana:

And they have empathy.

Dave:

Yeah.

Tana:

Right.

Dave:

Yeah.

Tana:

100%.

Dave:

I really like that. All of this though, into the day when I read through *The Relentless Courage of a Scared Child*, it comes down to building resilience. But what isn't really clear to me is that are you more resilient because of all this stuff that happened in the healing you did? Then you would have been had you not gone through those things?

Tana:

I think I am. I think I am. I think it really tested my mettle, if you will. So it's hard for me to say how I would have been if I hadn't gone through those things. But I think going through them definitely made me stronger. And I think like we talked about earlier, there are some people who fold under that pressure. There just are, and they are doing a lot of studies on resilience right now and I don't know that they have a definite answer. There's definitely a genetic component, but some people fold. I have two half sisters who just did not stand up well at all, they still can't sort of get on their feet which is really interesting.

They weren't raised in the same house with me, we didn't have the same mother and it's my mother that had grit. So that makes me believe in the genetic component. But what builds that resilience, if I don't go to the gym and work out and lift heavier weight, I'm not going to have heavier ... Stronger muscles, right? Or if I don't go train in karate, I'm not going to learn more skill. However, you want to say it, you've got to test it, you've got to practice it, you've got to work it to have those muscles. And so I do think to some degree that being exposed to certain things, I think there's a point though where if you're overexposed to it, and this isn't just me saying this.

My husband and I talked about this, there's research that shows if up to a degree, exposure to stress and trauma builds resilience beyond a certain point, and that point is different for everybody, it breaks you. And so and it can be different. So it just breaks you. One of my favorite books is Viktor Frankl's book, *Man's Search for Meaning*. I was like, "Oh my God, that man went through literally hell." And it's like why can some people do that and come out being such amazing humans with such an amazing sense of purpose? And then there are other people who one thing happens in their life, and they never recover from it. It's a good question.

Dave:

It sounds like we don't have even with all the hundreds of thousands of brain images that you guys have accumulated and all the wisdom, we still don't know how to tell. I'm a parent, right? And I want my kids to experience failure. I don't want my kids to experience trauma, but failure is a trauma at a certain point, like I worked really hard on that and I just didn't get it because someone was better. And I think that's really good and it's okay if they're really sad and they feel it. And that builds grit. But you also don't want to break them.

And it's like, "How does a parent know how to let your kids fail enough and experience enough pain to be strong, but not so much pain that it's unkind or sadistic or harmful in any way?" I feel like this is missing from all the world of parenting where like, "Let your kids feel that because they'll be okay."

Tana:

So I was raised very differently from how my daughter is being raised. Extreme, worked night and day. We were super poor when I was growing up. So I intentionally though started to see some of the entitlement and some of the issues with kids around the area that I live. And I'm like, "I don't really want to do that. I don't like that I'm not seeing these kids thrive." And so I actually went on this quest and I love this one parenting program that literally transformed how I parent and it's called Love and Logic and we actually now because it just was transformative for me, I actually submerged myself into it.

And we ended up during this pandemic, they were going to shut their doors after 30 years. We ended up sort of getting involved with them and becoming their partners so they wouldn't do that. That's how important I think it is. But love and logic is really about learning how to draw healthy boundaries, being a good coach, not being a helicopter parent, but letting your kids experience real life consequences. The problem is not kids, the problem is how we respond to their problems as parents. Most parents can't stand to see their kids in pain. And so they just can't.

I started to realize that early on, and I'm like, "I just don't want to raise this kid to be this entitled brat." So she's got to learn how to ... I had to step back and let her just do things and every time I would see her start to experience pain, I'm like, I'd want to jump in and I'm like, "Nope, not going to tell her what to do. Unless she asks me, I'm not going to tell her what to do." And so if she got in trouble, she had to pay the real life consequence for that, whatever that life consequence was for that action, I began to let her do it.

And now, the problem, there's one caveat though, one warning that I would give with that, and that my daughter is 17. And now, I want to be able to be involved in her life and help her more and she does not really need my help at all. I'm like, "Well honey, do you want my opinion?" "No, I'll let you know if I need your opinion. I'll let you know if I need your help." She's so independent. She's so self-sufficient.

Dave:

Kind of like her mom, right?

Tana:

Yeah, exactly. But that comes from letting her do it on her own from the failure, from not getting everything she wants, how she wants it.

Dave:

It's a tough thing because no parent ever wants to traumatize their kids. And we all want our kids to have everything and it's to the point, "Oh, you forgot your lunch? You'll be hungry today." No, we're not

going to drive home and get it for you. Tomorrow, remember your lunch already because I know, yeah, they can fast. It's alright.

Tana:

Exactly. I told my daughter it takes 30 days for kids to starve to death. If she forgot her project, then she's going to get the grade she gets. I already passed second grade, third grade, fourth grade. It's not my job. So I would let her do that and so she started to really learn, "Oh, I need to be responsible." The kid works two jobs now while she's in school just because that's her personality, but that comes from not giving her everything. So it's really important.

Dave:

One of the things about trauma, especially with someone with a degree of trauma that you have is usually you become a really shitty parent. And you don't do it on purpose. But it's because you do the same things to raise your kids that you experienced, and you do it automatically. It's built in, a deer will raise a baby deer doing what it was taught when it was a baby deer. It's not always conscious. It's a survival mechanism and it sounds like you dodged that bullet. And passing on intergenerational trauma is a big, it was intentional. So you studied and you did the work. Okay.

Tana:

So I think maybe part of it is being a nurse, maybe part of it is just that I am fairly introspective. But what I will say I started off probably headed down that road, doing the same ... Making some of the same mistakes that my family made. But I caught myself and I knew I figured it out pretty early. It's like, "I'm about to make the same mistakes I swore I would never do." And that's when I really was ... That's actually my motivation. That's when it's in my book. That's what caused me to go on the journey to open some of those wounds that I had shut the door so tightly on was because I had this daughter, and I'm like, "I'm going to screw her up. I don't want to screw her up the way that I had and raise her the way I had been raised." So that was intentional on my part to address that. But I was headed down that road, I was making some of those mistakes.

Dave:

One of the interesting things I've come across in my unusual spiritual travels, and also some of the stuff from 40 years of Zen with clients. When the parent of a child experienced a trauma, say at two years old, when their child turns two, suddenly their two-year-old trauma gets activated. Have you experienced that? I don't know if I asked the question very well, but yeah.

Tana:

My husband pointed that out to me because I would go through ... My favorite age with my daughter, I love middle schoolers, nobody loves middle schoolers. I love middle schoolers. I love that age with kids. I just think they're so awkward and funny, and just, they're ridiculous and they're just hilarious. They remind me of unicorns. And so I love that age. That was one of the few good times in my life and I didn't realize that connection. My husband's like, "You experienced what your daughter did." 15 was a really hard age for me. 15, 16, one of the worst times, and I found myself almost like projecting that onto my daughter. And Daniel was the one that caught me.

He's like, "Don't assume she's going through what you went through or treat her the way that you were at that age. She's not you." And I was like, "Oh, wow, okay." It's really helpful to have a partner who's that psychologically savvy.

Dave:

Yeah.

Tana:

But yes, it's very true.

Dave:

[crosstalk 00:38:32] was a few things, right?

Tana:

Yeah, it's very true.

Dave:

So you have a good partner there. How much of a role is best for a person's partner to take in their trauma healing?

Tana:

Wow, that's tricky because I think it really depends on the person. I'm a very strong personality. And the best way to get me to do something is tell me I can't, best way to get me not to do something that's telling me I have to.

Dave:

That's why we can be friends.

Tana:

Right. But my husband is I always say he's like very sneaky. He's very sly. So he uses that to his advantage. He'll be like, "Yeah, you probably don't want to do this today." Or, "I really don't want you working." I'm like, "That's why I've written 10 books in 10 years." "What? No, you can't say that." But I think because he's so gentle in his delivery, even when we were dating, I pushed him away, I broke up with him twice, I broke his heart, but he wouldn't go away. He didn't stop me, but he wouldn't go away. He was just like, "I love you enough and I have so much respect for you as a person that if it means being your friend, that's okay."

He would always find this slippery angle. And so he always has this really cool way of being my partner, not my parents. And I think that's a really key point is that when your partner tries to tell you what to do or parent you, at least for someone like me, that is not going to work. But when they come at it from a place of love and support, and like, "Look, I get you don't want to do this, but I'm here for you." Even as extreme as me breaking up with him and him going, "I still want to be here for you." That's someone you listen to. That's somebody who's just genuinely there for you.

Dave:

I think it's that being there and like, "Oh, you're going through some stuff, how can I help you? How can I support you?" But not carrying and not doing the work.

Tana:

You have to do this. Right. You can't fix people. One thing I've learned with my own family, fixing people rarely works. It's that difference between being the hand up and the handout and I'm not a fixer. I won't be more invested in something than someone else is. When I'm coaching someone, you've got to be invested. You're the one who has to do the work, I'm not going to fix you.

Dave:

Right. It makes a lot of sense and the whole partner thing is tough because if one person in a marriage or a relationship is traumatized, there's a very high degree or probability the other person is traumatized and that's part of why they were attracted to each other. Was that the case with you and Daniel?

Tana:

No, it's so funny. So I actually write about this again, in my book, I write about the story about how we met, and every once in a while the one thing that will butt heads over is he has this very ... His favorite movie is Pollyanna, drives me crazy. He wants to watch it over and over and over. It's like The Glad Game. I'm like, "Stop it." My favorite movie is Law Abiding Citizen, stop. So we have this very different way of looking at the world. But he also grew up with Leave it to Beaver and I grew up on with the Nightmare on Elm Street.

So we have this is extremely different and I always tease him. I'm like, "You've got Mickey and Minnie in your head doing the waltz, it's the happiest place on earth. What the heck?" And he's like, "You're always paranoid, you're looking over your shoulder waiting for the next bad thing to happen." So I don't know why we work so well, quite frankly and we just have fun. But I think he doesn't take things so seriously. I'm serious about everything. He doesn't take things so seriously and it causes me to let my guard down.

Dave:

David Deida talks about polarity as being really important. Just the distance between two people whether it's between the masculine and feminine which is what he talks about mostly or just even in this degree between, happy go lucky and intensity.

Tana:

Yeah.

Dave:

It seems like that can really work well.

Tana:

Oh, I could never be with someone like me. I could never be with someone like me. I'm so intense with everything. It would be a nightmare in my house. I often say he's my rock. He just grounds me, he soothes me. No matter what I'm wound up about, he's like, "It's going to be okay honey." And the minute he says that, I'm just like, "Oh, oh, oh, he's right. It's going to be okay." I just know it's going to be okay.

Dave:

I know that the telling your story in a book and really writing it down in and of itself can be healing. Did you experience a lot of healing as you wrote Relentless Courage?

Tana:

I did and not for the reason I thought. So I thought, "Okay, it's probably going to be cathartic." Although I was torn about whether I wanted to do it for a long time. But really the reason it was so cathartic, yes, the act of writing is really helpful. But writing it from an adult's perspective, when you're writing about childhood memories, there's a saying that our memories are always valid, but they're not always accurate. So having to write it, and when you're writing a story, but everyone is still alive, you have to have your facts correct, right?

So I had to have everything correct. So I had to interview everybody. And that process of interviewing the people in my life, even the ones that I wasn't close to when I was young or that I had issues with, that was so powerful because now I'm processing it from an adult perspective, and getting the perspectives of the other people that were in my life. Now I have a whole story, rather than just this the story of a little kid who was scared. And so I was able to reprocess it as an adult, it was so powerful.

Dave:

It's definitely, I've seen books where people are writing their story, and it's cathartic and you could tell your story and get to let it out. In this case though, you made it a little bit more instructional like, "All right, if I can go through all this and come out the way I am, you probably can't too because the odds are it wasn't that intense for you." But here's a question, you've done whatever healing came from the writing and interviewing process, and all of the things you've done with your brain and all the therapy and spiritual, all the stuff that's in there. How much more work do you have to do before you consider yourself fully free of all the trauma?

Tana:

I don't wake up every day and feel traumatized. I actually feel great, but I will do work for the rest of my life. Yeah, but I said I don't believe in an endpoint so much. I feel like the trauma is healed, but I will ... Here's the thing, it's life. We're going to have more trauma. 2020 was freaking trauma. So for a lot of people, trauma is not ... Things are going to happen throughout your life. What I want is skill. So that's why I practice martial arts. It's like you practice martial arts because it's like warriors don't show up on fight day and expect to win, they train every day so that when the fight shows up, they're ready. That's kind of what I like to do is I will never stop. I'm a seeker.

Now that I opened that door, I'm a seeker. I want skill because I know things happen. God forbid, but my best friend, her daughter was killed by a drunk driver. I think I would lose my mind, but because I have people like that in my life, and I'm constantly seeking, those are skills I want, God forbid when things happen, you have skill, now you're not that scared child. Now you're an armed adult.

Dave:

And there's two ways to look at trauma here. One is you need to heal the trauma, right?

Tana:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Dave:

And the other one is it's a limitation that you want to remove. And there's a reason that my Upgrade Labs company is called Upgrade Labs, not Heal Labs because what happens is after you deal with health or deal with healing, you continue evolving and there's always more levels. And then for everyone out

there, it's like, "Okay, how much of what I'm doing is healing versus becoming stronger?" And they're actually the same thing, but healing is getting back to normal. And then going beyond normal to levels that you don't know you can do, that's what interests me now.

But when I 30, it was all about, "Oh, my God, I had no idea I had any healing to do. But apparently, I have all sorts of crap in there that I didn't know about. So I got to sort through all that." And it's the idea that you're not going to stop and no one ever stops. And if they do, there's a word for it, it's called stagnant. And if you're stuck, and you're doing the same thing, that's not a very happy place, and you're likely to get depressed and anxious.

Tana:

No, I love what you're saying, I love this leveling up thing. And I have a different way of saying it, but it's the same thing. I often say I'd rather be healed than cured, I would never want to be cured. I actually wouldn't want to be cured from my past because it's why I'm a badass, it's why I'm so strong. I have a lot of confidence that I can handle a lot of things. I'm very competent. So life throws a lot of things at us, but I feel fairly competent, that came from hard work. So I wouldn't want to take that back.

One of my favorite art forms is something called Kintsugi, it's broken pottery that's mended with gold. It's a Japanese art form, and they mend this pottery with gold or platinum and I love the symbolism there. Because it's like they believe that that pottery is more beautiful because of those breaks, because each one of those breaks tells a story. And so I think of that and I'm like, "We are more beautiful, we are more complex, more interesting because of those broken pieces that we've mended back together and mends just like a scar, you can be stronger because of that, as long as you heal it, as long as you allow it to set."

Dave:

Yeah. I really like that picture because frankly, if everyone grew up in a world with no stress and no trauma, it'd be a pretty boring world. And if we turn the trauma dial up so much by watching the news all the time and becoming very, very fearful about things that are in the overall scheme of percentages, not as big as we think they are, that sometimes is that overwhelming trauma. Do you think that there's a lot of kids who are going to require trauma healing from 2020?

Tana:

100%. I don't think it, I know it because we had a record breaking year and it's sad that this is the reason we had a record breaking year. But suicide, depression, anxiety through the roof. Even in our own home, we had adopted our two nieces right before quarantine, and having three girls that are in their teen years, my daughter getting ready to go to college, they lost it because they don't have enough life experience to know, "Okay, this is not the end of the world, it's going to be okay." But this is the biggest thing that's happened for them.

To lose things, we can't really judge people's grief or their trauma. To lose graduation or scholarships because of sports or just your friend group which at that age, your friend group is the most important thing to you. Those are things that if we are nonchalant and we're like, "Get over it, there's a pandemic." Then they're going to suffer more than if we listen to them and help them through it. But I know they're suffering because when we don't listen to them, we don't help them through it. Teen suicide is through the roof.

Dave:

Yeah. I don't think we're counting those in the numbers and we should be because that's what informs our response to anything as a society is yet to look at the total impact of the system. Well, Tana, I think you've written a powerful book, and it's one that I would encourage you if you're listening to the show, I interview a lot of authors, you can tell I know Tana very well, and she's coming from ... Well, if you've written 10 books, you know how to write. So it's a good read.

But it also comes from just a place of wow, the odds are that if you're alive, and you haven't done conscious work on whether you want to call it trauma or just bad patterns in there, whatever word it makes you want to throw out the least, but there's stuff that you can't see because by design, you're not supposed to see it that is influencing your actions and your behavior and sucking your energy. And I want you to fix that and Tana wants you to fix that and her book has some very cool stuff in it about how it works. So this is a worthy read for you and thank you guys for listening to the show and Tana, thank you for being on the show.

Tana:

Thanks so much Dave.

Dave:

If you guys liked the episode today, you know what to do, figure out whatever trauma you have and then go smack it over the head. Okay, there's other ways to do it than that, or read the book and definitely read *Fast This Way* because the other big trauma that's out there is fasting. And if you were to say get fast this way and relentless courage on Amazon and you buy them together, then everyone will see that they should be read together because there is a great overlap between attacking that first F word, fear and that's what ultimately it's all about.

And if you didn't ever drink Bulletproof coffee, you didn't ever take a supplement, and you never ran electricity over your brain the way I like to do it and you just figured out how to have less trauma, I promise you, you'll perform better as a human being and that's why this really matters. So read the book, leave a review.