

Matt Bowles: Hey, everybody. It's Matt Bowles. Welcome to The Maverick Show. My guest today is Brooke Siem. She is an entrepreneur chef, author, public speaker, world traveler, and extreme performance training coach. After her path to being a professional ballet dancer was unexpectedly dashed, Brook became a chef and spent eight years in the New York City food and wine industry – which included cofounding Prohibition Bakery – and authoring the cookbook by the same name. Brook was named one of Zagat's 30 Under 30 and became a champion on the Food Network's TV show Chopped.

But Brooke's successful Manhattan life was also fueled by a lifelong battle with depression. Prescribed antidepressant and anti-anxiety drugs at age 15 after her father's sudden death, she realized at age 30 that she had been heavily medicated for half of her life and decided to make a massive change. In 2016, she became a digital nomad, signed up for the Remote Year program to travel the world with a community of 50 people for the entire year and she immediately got off all prescription drugs en route to meet the group in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

Today, in 2019 – and 32 countries later – Brooke remains off all prescription drugs, considers herself cured of clinical depression, and her primary focus now is on advocating for mental health and wellness without the use of antidepressants and anti-anxiety drugs. Though she believes that these sorts of drugs can have a place on the road to healing, Brooke's goal is to show that it is possible to live a joyful, centered life without the use of antidepressants. She is currently delivering keynote addresses on this topic, writing her memoir, and working on an international culinary project called Cooking With Grandmas.

In 2017, she sold her half of the Prohibition Bakery and turned her focus to coaching students in breath work and XPT, which stands for Extreme Performance Training. XPT teaches cutting edge fitness through a breathe-move-recover curriculum designed to stimulate growth in all aspects of human performance through exposure to a variety of natural elements and environments. By teaching XPT's train, adapt, and perform approach, Brooke empowers her students to strengthen and elevate the quality of their everyday life. Brooke, welcome to the show.

Brooke Siem: Thanks for having me.

Matt: Now we have to set the scene here and you and I have just spent an amazing four days in New York City, which is where we're recording this interview on our final day here. And we are currently drinking an incredible bottle of wine – which normally I describe the bottle of wine – but you and I actually went to the wine store together, consulted the sommelier on staff together, and you actually selected this one and you actually know more about wine than I do having worked both in a winery and in the Manhattan wine and food space for quite a while. So, I'm going to actually let you describe what we're drinking.

Brooke: So, we are drinking a Sancerre. It's a 2017 rosé and Sancerre is my favorite white drink. So, I love that this is a little bit like those whites, but it's also got this kind of buttery, strawberry minerality to it and it's a very pleasant wine to be drinking.

Matt: It's amazing. It's an afternoon interview that we're doing here. So, we're doing the rosé all-day theme as opposed to a red so that we'll stay awake through the whole interview. But Sancerre is an appellation in the Loire Valley of France, which you are very familiar with. I have actually, I don't know that I have ever had a Sancerre before – so, this is my first time – but I am very impressed.

Brooke: I am familiar with their wines. I am not familiar with their geography or I've never been to the area. But if I'm at a restaurant and I see Sancerre on their wine list, that's guaranteed, a slam dunk in my mind. So, I'll very often go to it unless there's something else intriguing, but I just love it.

Matt: I love that. So, we will be drinking through this lovely bottle of rosé during the interview and I feel like we need to start this discussion with what happened yesterday – which included me being coached by you – and it included the culmination which was a tourist spectacle is that you had us outdoors in New York City in January in an ice bath in Union Square.

Brooke: Yup.

Matt: For three minutes submerged in this ice bath.

Brooke: Not once, but twice.

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Matt: Exactly right. It was a three-minute ice bath outdoors in New York City in Union Square in January and then we would go into the sauna for about 12 minutes and then back in another three-minute ice bath outdoors. Can I tell you that the tourists who were gathering around absolutely loved it and, of course, I imagined myself because I'm normally walking around New York and seeing crazy stuff because it's New York City?

So, when you're walking around New York, It's normal to see crazy stuff and then you stand around and you gawk at whatever's happening and you're like, "Wow, that's a crazy person doing something crazy." And yesterday –

Brooke: You were one of those crazy people.

Matt: I was the subject. I was the crazy person and all the tourists were standing around and they're saying, "Why are these people sitting in ice baths outdoors in New York City in January for three minutes? Oh, my goodness." We were the spectacle.

Brooke: Mm-hmm. It was fantastic and not only that, I was amused by the people who like when you guys were actually in the sauna before you had actually gotten in the ice bath and I experienced this later because I also did the heat and ice myself after you guys were done and we'd be sitting in there and people would walk by and they saw these ice baths and curiosity just kicked in and so they stood around and waited for 10 to 15 minutes before something happened. There was this one father and daughter.

The daughter couldn't have been more than 5 or 6 years old and they just stood there waiting for 15 minutes before one of us got out and took a plunge in the ice bath and were then very delighted by the situation.

Matt: We were quite the spectacle, but let's contextualize now. We've given the impression of the tourist. If you were a tourist walking through Union Square yesterday morning, this is what you would have seen, but now let's sort of roll back and contextualize a little bit as to why we were doing that. It wasn't a crazy dare. I didn't lose a bet.

Brooke: No.

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Matt: It wasn't some insane thing like that. It was actually part of a really extraordinary program which I had heard about loosely because and anybody that listens to the Tim Ferriss show podcast he has interviewed Laird Hamilton and his wife Gabby Reece – who are the founders of this Extreme Performance Training program and on that particular episode, Tim Ferriss talks about himself having participated in it and all this other kind of stuff and a number of other people in that sort of universe are familiar with this.

So, I was loosely familiar with it from just that and then – when you became a certified XPT coach and you and I have now known each other for almost three years ... two and a half – when you became an XPT coach I started looking a lot more into exactly what it was. Then as it turned out, you were going to be conducting this workshop in New York City. Now, you're a Digital Nomad like I am. Neither one of us lives in New York at the moment, but you were going to be here doing this workshop and I was going to be here for other reasons.

So, I was like, “Wow, what an amazing opportunity to go and experience it.” It was truly incredible. It was a four-hour workshop and we started off with a CrossFit workout.

Brooke: Sort of. We had some CrossFit elements in there, but it was more of a focus on your breath and how it affects your movement and how it can totally change your physiology and how doing something very simple focusing on your breath and working through your inhale and exhale holds can actually make you feel like you've just run a marathon even though you did five burpees.

So, it wasn't classic CrossFit, but we took some elements of the way CrossFit combines different movements together and then layered on the breath work on top of it to create what appeared to be a very taxing workout given how much all of you guys were sweating.

Matt: That's true. So, there was a section of it that was breath work only and we were just breathing.

Brooke: Right, right.

Matt: Then there was a section that implemented the CrossFit workout –

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which was quite a taxing workout I must say – and incorporated the breath work.

Brooke: Right.

Matt: Then at the very end, we did the fire and ice – which was the 12 minutes in the sauna, three minutes in the ice, 12 minutes in the sauna, three minutes in the ice – which was an incredible way to end. I thought it was a very powerful experience.

For me, I had never done anything like that. So, I was actually quite scared about it – you know going into it – and it was pretty intimidating. It was definitely like growth zone stuff for me because I was pretty intimidated by it, but I wanted to do it and particularly because you were coaching it and running the workshop, I felt as comfortable as I could be you know and I wanted to try it and I wanted to experience it and I had heard from you about how transformative it's been for you and for your students. So, it was an amazing opportunity.

Brooke: I think that there are – especially through travel and starting your own business, whatever it is – there are always these roadblocks you end up against where you are so clearly out of your comfort zone and, for me, the more I can explore that in my physical body, the more the mental and emotional aspects of being out of my comfort zone they're easier to handle because I'm a very physical and kinesthetic person and so I feel like I can feel something off – even if it's .1% different than it was yesterday. I can feel that in my body and it's always direct feedback for me.

So, when I get in a 32-degree ice bath and dunk my head under and have an initial shock that is just, “Get me the hell out of here” or “What are you doing?” Those are the same thoughts that run through my head in a stressful life situation – even though there's no actual ice or physical stressor involved. So, I've found so much benefit in learning how to calm myself down – both through breath work and just observing the thoughts that come into my mind in the middle of an ice bath – or also for me I don't do too well with heat.

So, extended sauna sessions push my comfort zone quite a bit. Once I get in there and I can explore the physical side of things and go through the mind talk and whatnot, I find it translates so easily

into everyday life where what used to be stressful for me two years ago or whatnot suddenly becomes something that I not only feel like is nothing compared to hanging out in an ice bath for an extended period of time, but also I have the tools to calm down, move forward, fix it right away without getting so emotionally attached to the reaction.

Matt: Yeah. I want to talk about both of those things first in terms of the physical fitness part of it and the developing of a breath practice and the mechanics of that because you have a long history as a very serious athlete – professional level dancer, gymnast, CrossFitter – I mean you’ve maintained a very high level of athletic prowess your whole life. Can you talk a little bit about it, for example, just in terms of the breathing?

Brooke: Mm-hmm.

Matt: The breathing practices that you used for most of your athletic life up to XPT and then – once you learned these breathing practices and the XPT techniques and some of that kind of stuff – what, for you, changed in terms of the physical stuff?

Brooke: Right. So, I’m not even going to go into the athletic side, to begin with. I’m just going to go straight into my childhood and kind of what I experienced as a child. So, my father is someone who was a huge part of my life. I was an only child. I knew he loved me unconditionally, but he had his own demons that he battled and he was a very angry and rageful person. So, he would throw things and my childhood was very loud and very chaotic and there was constant noise and banging around. So, just as a natural response – what you do when you suddenly hear a garbage can smash into a wall – is you kind of hold your breath a little bit at the top.

So, I grew up in an environment where I was constantly just [sharp inhale sound] and holding my breath. So, that became a place of comfort for me in essence. Then I was also a very serious dancer, which means you are holding in your stomach. You are trying to keep your core as tight as you can. You’re breathing into your chest all the time because you’re literally stitched up into a corset. So, I continued breathing into my upper chest and also – in these short breath holds – on the inhale.

And then I go into my adult life. I started doing CrossFit very

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competitively, which meant I was breathing at a very high rate because of the cardiovascular stress that was always on my body and then I hit 30 and every aspect of my life changed. Once I started traveling and whatnot and I started to get to know my body in a way that was completely different. It was independent of physical activity. It was dealing with all the trauma I had had as a child and whatnot and suddenly, I realized that I have spent so much of my life – I mean my entire life – living in this constant state of almost over breathing and stress.

So, when I first started really focusing on my breath and breath work – if you timed my breathing – I was breathing in 19 times a minute. So, in an out is one breath cycle and I was doing that 19 times in one minute. That is absurdly high. In a happy place, you would breathe between five to seven breaths where you have a nice, quiet inhale and a little hold at the top and a long exhale. So, I was just at rest breathing like I was running. And that has a huge impact on your entire physiological system and you're telling your body you're stressed all the time.

So, I made a conscious effort to start learning how to live on the lower spectrum of breath, to retrain my breathing mechanics into being comfortable breathing five to seven times a minute, which means slowing down, slowing everything down. And as I did that, I also started to have a greater understanding of my mental state and my physical body and it connected to everything. So, now when I do go up into that high breath per minute – whether or not that's intentional if I'm working out or unintentionally because I'm in a stressful situation – I can recognize it and I understand that doesn't have to be where my normal is and so I can bring it back down.

Matt:

Wow, yeah. That's a major change particularly because you were at that level of athletic conditioning beforehand and then you subsequently were able to make just a breathing change. It was really interesting for me because I have not done a lot of breath work. I mean I've taken yoga classes where there are instructional breathing things and stuff like that.

So, I've done a little bit of that, but you guys were doing some very interesting things with this yesterday in terms of the way we were incorporating breath into the CrossFit stuff in terms of, for me, the concept of the exhale hold which normally – when people

think about holding their breath – it’s like when you’re going to jump into a pool. You inhale and you hold your breath.

You hold the inhale and then you jump into the pool and you swim underwater and then you come up whereas what you guys were having us do yesterday is exhale out all of the air and then hold the exhale before taking another breath and do a walk with holding two kettlebells down to the one end of the gym and back and walk as far as you can without taking a breath. Then when you absolutely need to take a breath, stop, put the kettlebells down, take the breath, and then exhale the whole thing out and – once you’ve exhaled it all out again – pick them back up and keep walking.

I had never done an exercise like that before and so, for me, the first round when I did it, I went down and then I had to put them down halfway. I went down to the end, put them down again, came back halfway, put them down again. So, it took me basically four attempts to get all the way back and then the second time I went, it took me only three attempts I was able to do it. And then the third time, I was able to go all the way down on one and then come all the way back on another and do it with just two exhale holds.

Brooke:

Right. The mind will talk to you so much during breath work and it will just ... it doesn’t want to be in a place where it can’t take a breath. It’s just obviously we need to breathe to stay alive so you go into instant panic mode if you’re just like, “Crap. I can’t breathe.” Then your brain tells you, “Well, you have to stop and take a breath” when in reality the brain is just kind of an early chatter and we don’t actually need to take that breath because our body is really filled with lots and lots and lots of oxygen.

So, we have to just learn to tolerate the amount of carbon dioxide buildup that’s happening when we’re doing ... I mean when we’re just sitting, our body is constantly producing carbon dioxide. But when we’re doing physical work – like you were doing – we’re producing even more. So, that need to breathe is actually because you have a buildup of CO<sub>2</sub> in your body and it’s uncomfortable and your body wants you to get rid of it because it doesn’t like to be there and it thinks that maybe you’re not going to get another breath to come.

So, by doing the kind of exercise that we were having you do, you

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start to realize where your line is and you – in just three rounds of this – realized very quickly that you can push yourself a lot further than you could have and that your body can actually tolerate it. Over time, when you keep doing that consistently, you can really extend the amount of time where you can tolerate that CO<sub>2</sub> and your body then becomes better oxygenated and that is good for your brain and your organs and all the things.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about this concept of developing a breath practice?

Brooke: Mm-hmm.

Matt: What does that involve? I know you're actually a breath coach and you actually have clients – some of whom are remote from other places around the country or the world – that pay you to coach them and you coach them remotely. Can you talk a little bit about what types of clients you have and what a breath practice development does and the benefits of that?

Brooke: Right. So, for me – and I'm going to use my own story as an example – is just given the environment that I grew up in, I was very comfortable in certain aspects of breathing – specifically taking in a breath and then holding it there – because of all of my time being startled growing up. But if you asked me to do a long exhale hold and just a long exhale, I would straight up panic. It would go into anxiety panic. That was not a comfortable place for me to be.

So, for me, the breath practice is getting comfortable in all four corners of breath – so being able to be comfortable on the inhale and the hold and then the exhale and the hold there as well – because if I want to use my breath as any sort of gear shifting – whether or not it's if I have a big talk to give and I'm nervous – I want to be able to calm myself down. To do that, I need to be able to exhale for a nice, controlled, long exhale and if I can't do that because I haven't practiced it because my whole life has been spent in this state of [sharp inhale sound], then I can't actually access the benefits of being able to have this long breath hold.

Similarly in a workout, if I want to ramp it up, I need to make sure that I'm breathing properly and so my body's properly fueled. So, for me, the breath practice is as much of a mental as it is a physical

benefit. I've spent a decent amount of time over the past few years in meditation, but I've found that breath work is a way that really grounds me into that meditative state because it has such practical benefits that I can see in my day-to-day life whereas meditation – as much as I like it and I know it's beneficial – sometimes it can take a few months or years before you realize the benefits of meditation whereas the breath work I can turn to whenever I need.

So, that's how I approach it with my clients as well. I look at their situation and where their stressors are in their life, where their patterns are in their life, where they are having injury or poor performance at work or in their relationship or whatever it is and we then say, "Okay, what is your breath work like in that moment and how can we actually use your breath to help get you into a mindset where you are clear to be able to handle a stressful situation or you can – if you need to – perhaps upregulate?" Let's say you're someone who's going into a big meeting and you need to amp yourself up. There are breath work techniques we can use to actually activate your system.

If you're someone who's so nervous and about to hyperventilate before a big meeting, there are breath work techniques we can use to calm you down. So, one of my favorite clients that I have right now he's actually a professional poker player and he just arrived in Manila a couple of weeks ago and he'll be there for seven months playing in live, casino tournaments that can last 10 to 14 hours. That's an absurd amount of time to be focusing on something and also poker players as a whole in my experience are not the greatest at taking care of themselves.

So, by working together, he and I are working on things like, "Okay, how I am going to eat for dinner and then – after dinner – what sort of breath work am I going to do in order to have me focus for the last three hours of the tournament because I know that everybody else is going and eating a basket of chicken wings and having a couple of beers and they're coming back far less focused than they were before?" So, if he can just move his game from 75 to 80% after dinner when everybody else is hanging around at 65, 60%, he has a huge advantage. So, that's the way we're using it to facilitate him.

Matt: So, what would you recommend – just for listeners, let's say people that don't have experience with breath work – who are

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interested in exploring at least the introductory level benefits of developing a breath practice? What would be some basic techniques or exercises that people could start practicing at a very beginning level that could help them with stressful situations in their life eventually and that sort of stuff? How would you recommend people begin?

Brooke:

So, the first thing that I always want people to focus on is to make sure they're breathing through their nose and not breathing through their mouth during 99% of life. I mean the only time you should really switch into breathing through your mouth is if you're sprinting. If you're trying to perform at a really high level and you are giving everything you have, then – by all means – you're going to need to switch into breathing through your mouth.

But the reality is if you look at people just wandering around the street and picking out lemons at the grocery store, everyone's just breathing through their mouth and it's the difference between drinking pond water and drinking filtered water because the nose was designed to breathe, not the mouth. The mouth was designed to eat and talk. So, I try and get my clients to become aware, step one, of just going through your nose at all times because that's going to have a big impact on your physiology just from the start.

Then once we're at that point where we can be aware of when we unconsciously slip into nose mouth breathing or mouth only breathing and we're focusing only on our nose, then I usually start with the box breath, which is one of the simplest breathing tools that can be hugely beneficial. So, if you think of the breath as a box. So, there's an inhale and then there's a hold where you have big, full lungs and belly, and then there's the exhale, and then there's the exhale hold where everything is out. We do a one-to-one-to-one ratio.

So, it's three seconds of an inhale, three seconds of a hold, three seconds of an exhale, and three seconds of a hold at the bottom. Even within that box breath, you can scale it up or down. So, if three seconds feels really comfortable for you, you can try four, and if four feels good, try five, and maybe you can work your way all the way up to 10 seconds. As you do that, you can notice where you feel uncomfortable, if you start to feel panicked or anxious, and where in the box you start to feel panicked and anxious. And then you can start to suss out weak spots.

Matt: So, would you say, in general – like for me let's just say – to start practicing this that – as I walk down the street later tonight – I should try to be conscious of breathing in and out only through my nose?

Brooke: Yes, 100%.

Matt: And I should just – whenever I can be consciously aware to try to do that – I should just do that in my life to the greatest percentage as possible?

Brooke: Absolutely.

Matt: That's the baseline and then – as I'm doing that while I'm walking down the street – to try to then start implementing the box breath practice while I'm walking down the street – three seconds in, three seconds hold, three seconds out, three seconds hold – and then just to try to do that when I can be aware of that and just practice it as I'm walking down the sidewalk?

Brooke: Yeah, absolutely. I mean I usually say that start with just sitting or lying down because the more variables you throw onto this, the more complicated it gets for your mind and body. So, if you don't have a handle of a three-second box breath when you're just sitting quietly by yourself in the morning, you're not going to have a handle on it when you're walking down the street or doing whatever you're doing. So, once you feel comfortable in that box breath sitting in the morning – and that's why it's part of a great morning routine or meditation practice if that's something you like to do – because it's part of that morning where you're trying to center yourself and get quiet and just feel into your body and your breath.

So, once you get comfortable there, then you can get in a tabletop position where you've got your knees and your hands on the ground and now you're in a different position. Can you breathe comfortably in the box breath there? Can you do it standing? Can you do it walking? Could you take a jog, maybe sit on a bike in the gym? How does that work as you start moving and adding more variables on top of it?

Matt: Right. And then the idea is to do it with regularity so that you're

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more regularly doing it in this way to maintain a regularity of that and then also you talked about stress before and trying to use these types of things in stressful situations – which was very interesting yesterday, of course, in the ice bath – because the ice bath, of course, is a very intense, stressful situation where you are intentionally subjecting your body to an environment that is really uncomfortable.

What you had us do was to use the breathing practices that you taught us in the ice bath for the entire three minutes so that we could calm ourselves down and maintain a level of steady ability to endure the discomfort by calming our bodies down through our breath?

Brooke: Right.

Matt: So, that then is applicable to life situations. Right?

Brooke: Mm-hmm.

Matt: So, when you get let's say there's a stress spike in your life. You receive a phone call or an email and it has a highly stressful piece of information in it or something occurs that triggers ... It's a major stress trigger. Do you respond to that by then – or should we – respond to that by then trying to go into the breathing practice to process the information and be able to then deal with it in a calm and rational state?

Brooke: Right.

Matt: Or how do you transition there?

Brooke: So, in that particular example, my goal would be to calm down as fast as possible – not only just because it's uncomfortable for me to be in a stressful state – but also because I'm more likely to do something really stupid and respond too quickly or whatever it happens to be in a stressful state. So, this actually happened to me the other day. I just had a highly annoying series of emails that were stressing me out and immediately what I go to in that case is I want my exhale to be longer than my inhale because nice, long exhales help to calm the body down. They help us enter the parasympathetic state, which is the part of our nervous system that helps keep us really calm.

So, as I was thinking about what I was writing – even though I felt like a bull trying to get set off to go charge with steam coming out of my nose – I was making a conscious effort to [inhaling and exhaling sounds] like a really long exhale that I could hear because the sound, for me, helps ground me. So, I was doing that as I was doing this email. Then when it was done, I don't know if I sent the email or decided to sit on it, but I closed my computer, put it aside, and spent about 10 minutes breathing approximately four seconds in and then I like to do a seven-second hold at the top and eight seconds out. That is, for me, the best to calm me down as quickly as possible.

So, I did that for 10 minutes or so. Ten minutes is a great amount of time to really come back down into that sympathetic state. So, after I went through my 10 minutes – with four seconds in, seven second hold, and eight seconds out – I was ready to go back into the rest of my life without being a jerk to the guy who was getting my coffee or to the person who was being slow in front of me on the street or whatever it happened to be. The situation hadn't changed, but I was able to handle all those other little stressors significantly better.

Matt: And do you use the same practice for varying different emotions? You mentioned just now the situation which I interpret to be anger, right? You're upset and you're mad about something. But would you use the same breathing techniques for any kind of like, for example, if you fear – if you have a high level of financial duress or fear of something, trepidation about something? You had mentioned preparing to public speak. For some people, that's a major fear, right?

Brooke: Right.

Matt: So, for all these different emotions, do you use the same breath practice to steady yourself?

Brooke: Personally, I use a lot of similar breathing protocols. So, the four, seven, eight is – for some reason – it's just by far my favorite. I really like it. I also like the box breath – especially under long box breath sessions – like 10-minute long box breath makes me feel really calm at the end of it. So, for me, those are the ones that work well for me and pretty much stress is stress. Yes, there is good

stress and bad stress.

Good stress is exposing yourself to short bursts of ice bath where you're stressing your whole system and you're stressing your mind and you're learning how to control it. Bad stress is when your boss just puts you in a state of rage and you have to see him for eight hours a day or whatever it is. So, while there are good stresses and bad stresses – at the end of the day – we can use the same sort of breathing techniques to calm down all different kinds of stresses and all sorts of emotional triggers – whether or not it's anger or fear or anxiety – whatever it is. Those similar breath practices can apply and help just calm you down.

Matt: Awesome. I want us to go back now a little bit and talk a little bit about your story – which is also going to, obviously, end up in the same place where we're talking now – in terms of how you are managing everything in your life and stress and everything else in an incredible way. I want us to just jump back 20 years or so.

Brooke: Twenty years.

Matt: However long you want to—

Brooke: Thirteen. It's 13 years ago.

Matt: However long you want to jump back and maybe just start with your story coming up through ballet and coming up through your professional trajectory and ultimately your experience with prescription medication and then getting off of that, starting to travel, and that whole thing. So, I just want you to start with sharing that story and we'll ultimately end up at the same place where we are today. But I think that's a really, really important backstory if you're willing to share that.

Brooke: Sure. So, I was born and raised in Reno, Nevada but I spent a lot of time in New York as a kid actually training in ballet at the Joffrey Ballet School when it was here in New York. So, I would come with my mom during the summers and train for many, many hours a day and we lived in convents and whatnot and you know without any air conditioning in the dead of New York City summers that just made you feel like you were trying to inhale soup. I had this love for dance and I was very good at it and very talented at it and there was always – in the back of my mind – something.

I thought about maybe I could do this as a career, but then I had also grown up in a household that valued a college education and everything I felt like I was doing from fourth grade on was to make sure I had the right grades to get the best teachers to get into the best class to therefore have the best preparation for the SATs and the APs so I could get into the best college and therefore have a life that would somehow still be totally devoid of any sort of stress or bad things. And, of course, that's not how life works, but somehow I thought that was how it would work as a kid. But when I was 15, I was actually traveling.

I was very lucky to have had international travel experiences fairly early on. I went to Australia by myself when I was 14 and New Zealand and then – when I was 15 – my mom and I decided we were going to take a cruise and go from Barcelona to Istanbul. This was 2001 and my father was not a big traveler and so he did not come with us. When we were in Naples – docked on the ship – we got a call saying we needed to come home right away because my father had gone into surgery and they had found a grapefruit-sized mass of pancreatic cancer in surgery and that we needed to come home and say goodbye. So, we were pulled off the ship and left all our bags there.

I don't know the logistics of any of this or how it even happened, but we basically got from Naples to Reno in over a series – multiple series – of random flights and ended up in Reno and then went to the hospital and said goodbye. A few days later, he never woke up or recovered from that and so all the machines were turned off and then my whole life was suddenly very, very, very different. So, at that point, I mean just the unexpectedness of the whole thing I think the trauma that I didn't realize I was experiencing at the time and the shock and I was an only child.

So, it was just me and my mom and so many things had suddenly changed and I didn't know how to deal with it because why would I? I was 15 and so I didn't grieve in what was considered a traditional way. I wasn't a crier. I'm not even – to be honest – quite sure what was so off about what I was doing because I have a very big chunk of memories that are gone from that time.

But I know that I was eventually taken to a child psychologist and sent to a child psychiatrist and ultimately put on a cocktail of

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antidepressants and antianxiety drugs and – because I was such a people pleaser and I was very much a young 15 years old and I wanted to do what my parents said and make sure that I didn't somehow screw up the rest of my life by not doing what they said and breaking the rules – I took these drugs and we found a cocktail that worked for my body – at least we thought – and I just went about my life that way.

So, as I was coming into this massively transformative time as a child going into puberty and early adulthood, I was also medicated. So, looking back now, I can see that there are parts of me that were effectively stunted that I've had to readdress now in my 30s – which has been fun. It's been like a second puberty, which is bizarre. But on the other hand, it was 2001. The internet was barely a thing. I was from Reno, Nevada. It was not the most progressive place. I fairly quickly turned 18 after all of that and was suddenly in charge of my own medical decisions and I didn't trust. No doctors were telling me that I should consider going off the drugs. So, what difference did I know?

So, I stayed on them and then I basically just blinked my eyes and woke up when I'm in my 30s. I had co-owned this business in New York. I lived in a Manhattan apartment and I sort of had these things that I was supposed to have sort of. It was quite nontraditional. I wasn't working an office job or wearing a suit to work, but I still I had checked the major boxes and I was just massively unhappy. I was suicidal. I didn't see a way out of the situation.

But because I had turned 30 – and so my father died in 2001 just a couple months before 9/11 – so I always knew that if they said it was the 15 year anniversary of 9/11, it was also the 15 year anniversary of my father's death. So, at that time – when I realized that 15-year number – I suddenly became very aware of the fact that if I stayed on these drugs I was going to have spent a longer period of my life on them than I would off of them. And not only that – the time I had spent on them – was my entire adult life and that didn't sit well with me specifically because I was so unhappy and I just wondered like, “I don't even know what my personality would be like without these drugs.”

“Would I make the same choices? Would I be who I am? Would I be incapacitated and need ... Do I need to be on these drugs?” I

just had no idea and I hadn't had very good guidance from the psychiatry community. So, that was about the same time that I saw a random ad for Remote Year and I was drunk and bored one night and just applied. My life was not in a position to go on Remote Year. I owned a bakery in Manhattan. There's nothing remote about that. I made approximately \$2,000.00 a month – which is about as much as Remote Year costs.

So, there was nothing in my life that was set up for this but – because I was just so unhappy and I realized – I was like, “This will never happen.” I didn't think that I would actually ever get it. I applied and then – lo and behold – I got through the next step and the next step and so on and so forth. They were eventually offering me this spot on this trip and I kind of knew.

I had this intuitive feeling in my heart that I had to go on this trip – that I would regret it for the rest of my life if I didn't – but I wasn't particularly excited. I knew that in making the decision to go, I was dropping a nuclear bomb on my life and that it was going to be a lot of bullshit to get through and – not only that – I knew that I really had to get off the drugs because I didn't trust that I would even be able to get them filled in some of the places on our itinerary because Phnom Penh, Cambodia was on our itinerary and a remote island in Thailand.

Yeah, I knew that they had decent pharmacies in Thailand, but I still wasn't sure they'd be able to get the exact thing I needed. So, the convergence of all these events just made me say, “All right, well it's time to, I guess, get off these things.” So, I started the process of withdrawal under the unsupportive guidance of a psychiatrist who made it very clear to me that she thought it was a terrible decision and it turned out to be the single worst experience of my entire life and it lasted for almost a year. So, much of my time traveling was actually while I was still experiencing withdrawal symptoms from these drugs.

So, coming out on the other side of that though, I suddenly began to see that there was so much of my life effectively that I had lost. I know now 100% that had I not been medicated when I was 15, I would never have been in the situation that I was. I can't say if it would have been better or worse, but I know it would have been different because the way I made choices was very different than the way I make choices now. That realization just made me really

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mad and it scared me a little bit because I felt like I had accidentally and unintentionally ended up somewhere where I really didn't belong.

It didn't resonate with who I was and it was also my entire 20s and it just makes me so sad still to think that I lost my entire 20s to being in a place I didn't know I wanted to be in because I was so drugged out. So, now these past few years it's been my goal to just not only tell my story in hopes that people take it into consideration when they're on their own mental health journey, but also finding other ways to deal with this stuff. That's where XPT came in because the breath work has actually been huge in helping me manage some of the side effects of being a human.

Matt: Let's talk a little bit about the travel experience because you and I met each other on Remote Year. We were in the same Remote Year group.

Brooke: The "Tots"!

Matt: "Libertatem". Shout out to the Tots, yes, which turned out to be an extraordinary group of humans. Obviously, everybody comes together and nobody knows each other when you get there. It's 50-ish strangers who—

Brooke: Between 75 and 30.

Matt: Yeah, somewhere between 30 and 75 people come together as strangers and travel the world together for a year and everybody has to be able to work remotely or finance their expenses somehow. Then by the end of the year, everybody that finishes the program – a couple of people drop out for different reasons – but everybody that finishes the program really is a family by the end of it and it is an extraordinary experience.

Brooke: At least in our experience. I'm not sure if they all have that connection, but I'm biased.

Matt: Yeah. Our group was amazing and was it super special and it was really incredible. But when you get there, you have no idea what to expect because it's 50 strangers, right?

Brooke: Mm-hmm.

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Matt: So, going into it, I was like, “You know what? Anybody that’s willing to leave everything and everybody that they know behind and travel the world for a year with a bunch of strangers at minimum is an interesting person with a story that I want to hear.”

Brooke: Yeah. See me coming into that was saying that, “If there’s any chance any of these other 50 to 75 crazy people are in my headspace right now, this is going to be a disaster” because things were not going well in my head when I arrived in Kuala Lumpur.

Matt: So, let’s talk about that a little bit because I remember very distinctly in our orientation what they had us do was they had us do a mini, short, 60-second – because there were a lot of us there. So, they had us do 60-second presentations about ourselves and they’re like, “Come up with one slide that has some things that encapsulate you and you get 60 seconds to talk about yourself and introduce yourself to the group.” So, people are doing all different stuff.

Brooke: A lot of collages and photos.

Matt: Collages and photos and “Here is me with my family at the lake and here’s this stuff and I like sports and I like this” or whatever. So, can you talk about your orientation slide and what you did in KL because that immediately grabbed my attention and endeared me to you and I said, “This is a woman that I want to meet and I want to get to know.” Can you explain what that was and why and the meaning?

Brooke: Yeah. So, I found Remote Year to be a very stressful organization from day one because it was like you go through this whole process and then you give them \$5,000.00 – or at least that was at the time – and then suddenly it was like they just gave us a bunch of homework and things to do and it was so massively overwhelming with all of the things we had to do in order to prepare and get to Kuala Lumpur in addition to the fact that I already had a massive amount of things to do just in my personal life – like figure out what I was going to do with my dog and deal with the fallout of telling my business partner that I was leaving – and also I was in heavy withdrawal from these antidepressants, which were causing some real psychological issues with me.

So, one of the things Remote Year asked us to do was create this slide. When I saw that, it was just kind of like, “I don’t have time for this shit” and also I was in such a bad place that the last thing I could do was make a collage of all the things that mattered to me as I was effectively trying to blow them up. So, I put it off and I put it off and I think one of our program leaders was emailing me saying – she’s British and she was like – “Brooke, can you please get me your slide? The deadline was last week.” I’m just sending a digital middle finger over email.

So, I’m at my ex-stepbrother’s house – and he’s a ridiculous human – and I was in the bathroom and he had this framed poster that said something like really pithy and saccharin and just kind of makes me want to barf in my mouth a little bit. That was like, “Dream, desire, destination” in curlicue writing or something. What he had done – because he also thought it was just ridiculous – was take a big piece of duct tape and he wrote, “Kick life in the dick” and just taped it over the frame.

So, you’re sitting in this bathroom in this house in Lake Tahoe taking a piss looking at this framed photo that just says, “Kick life in the dick” and this was 10 days maybe before I was supposed to leave and I’m just sitting there on the toilet like, “What am I doing with my life?” So, I took a photo of this thing because I thought it was hilarious and then I just moved on with the next few days. I’m sure I got another very important email from our program leader about needing this slide right away and I was just like, “I don’t know what to do.”

So, I just sent her this photo because it was effectively the only mantra that felt appropriate in my life because I was questioning every decision I had made from every decision basically from graduating – even making the decision to go to the college I went to. Every single decision seemed to have created this domino effect that led to this absolute tragic situation where everyone in my life seemed to hate me and I was leaving everything I knew and I had to give up my dog and I was having this terrible physical and emotional time. The only thing I kept thinking to myself was like, “Well, you have to just kick life in the dick.”

It seemed like an appropriate way to introduce yourself to 75 strangers and – in some sense – I figured that the people who got it were people who would get me and the people who didn’t were

maybe people I didn't need to get me, you know?

Matt: That's amazing.

Brooke: And here we are.

Matt: That's amazing. So, I saw that and I was like, "Wow." But there are 70 people presenting all this different stuff.

Brooke: It was like day two I mean.

Matt: Yeah and you're going one minute, one minute, one minute, one minute, but that stood out from everybody else and everybody laughed. I mean it was amazing and I was like, "I have got to get to know this woman" but we didn't really connect until the second month – which was on the island in Thailand. I would notice things about you because you're trying to talk to all of these different people and get to know all these different people and then, "Is this person out of the place where you are and did you talk to them?" and this and that.

So, I feel like our paths didn't cross that much, but I noticed certain things about you – which is I noticed one was your photography skills – which you were one of the by far most talented photographers in the group and we'd be going to these different things and people would be taking pictures of stuff and your pictures people would be talking about them, you know? They were like, "Did you see Brooke's picture? We were at the same thing, but did you see Brooke's picture of that thing that we were at because that looked very different from my picture." So, I was like, "Wow."

It's like you were an artist, you were creative, and you were interesting and then you had done that presentation at the beginning. So, I found you super, super, super interesting and yet I didn't know if it was you were being more reclusive or if it was just me not being in the same place as you or noticing you or whatever. But we really didn't connect in a meaningful way I think until the second month. Of course, I had no idea that you were going through any of these things or even that you were struggling at all. Do you know what I mean?

Brooke: Yeah.

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Matt: Because we're just all, "Hey, here's who we are. My name's so and so. I'm this." Do you know?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: So, we don't necessarily put all that stuff out there, right?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: But can you talk a little bit about just what you were going through and then how that evolved as you traveled and what that experience was like for you?

Brooke: Yeah. So, I pretty much showed up to Kuala Lumpur after all my years of antidepressants and whatnot. I have built up this bandage – almost a cast – that was sort of keeping me together. Then as soon as I got off all the drugs, what I had done was take off the support and I had been left with all of the trauma and grief that I experienced – not only from my father and whatnot, which was obviously there – but also all of the experiences that I had had going into adulthood that I had never properly felt or dealt with because I had this filter of drugs for the whole time.

So, when I got off those drugs, it just came rushing back all at once and a lot of that was really going strong in the very early months of Remote Year specifically. I got off my last drug in July of 2016 and we showed up to Kuala Lumpur in late August. So, the last drug I had gotten off of had a particularly long half-life, which meant that it actually stayed in your system for a while. So, actually, in the first bits of Remote Year, that's when the drug was actually leaving my system. So, I was dealing a lot with the withdrawal side effects from that particular drug while we were traveling.

So, what happened there is I was left with a lot of unexplainable physical and emotional situations that were very much amplified from not only the situation we were in but also just the country we were in. I have always been very sensitive to sound – even as a kid – and when I got off all of the drugs my sound sensitivity increased so much that I was having trouble just living in New York in the last few months I was here and then, luckily, had a few weeks when I was in my hometown where things are just naturally quieter

because it's not New York. Then we showed up in Kuala Lumpur and, for me, it was like I was assaulted every day.

Just the sounds of the hearing and I had trouble just going outside. So, there were times where I would be out with Remote Year tots and we'd be in the middle of a restaurant and I would have to leave the restaurant or I would ask to move. That's a really weird way to introduce yourself to a group of strangers to say like, "I can't be in this restaurant because of the noise." I don't think that people really understood how to deal with that and therefore I would feel the kind of uncomfortable curiosity and therefore distanced myself a little bit because I was uncomfortable telling them what was going on because I barely knew. I was dealing with it myself and also just, I don't know, it was so awkward.

So, that's what was going on behind the scenes and so when I did come out, it was on the days that I was feeling a little bit better and then I would very often just have to leave because of whatever was going on. But I spent so much of my first few months just working with my counselor, who happened to be remote himself – which was an amazing resource – and just taking walks and sitting in these places and doing very quiet activities by myself where I started to explore the new body that I was living in because it wasn't anything like the old body.

I found things like alcohol even affected me very differently and we were not a sober group if you will. Even in a country where drinking is generally condemned – because Malaysia has a huge Muslim population – we managed to find all the alcohol and that didn't work too well for me in the first couple months. So, I had to leave and find other ways to entertain myself and whatnot. So, it's a big reason why I didn't see people in the first few months because I was off taking a walk somewhere.

Matt:

Yeah. And I think you eventually – because the first month, I had no idea that you were going through any of this stuff and you certainly didn't publicize it in any way and you and I hadn't really meaningfully connected – and then it was well into the second month I think that you finally posted something publicly. You just put it out on Facebook. Obviously, everybody in the group is already friends on Facebook. So, I was following you on social media and I saw a public post that you put out and it was just something to the effect of that you had been crying most days or



something like that.

Brooke: Was it the blog post about how Thailand was trying to kill us? I think it may have been that one.

Matt: It might have been or I feel like it was even maybe just a personal Facebook status update where you were basically just saying, "I really miss certain friends of mine and I've been having a really hard time here and I've been crying most days" or something to that effect, you know?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: You and I had literally not even had an extended conversation yet and I can remember just reading that and that was my first like, "Whoa." I had no idea that you were struggling or I thought maybe you were kind of introverted or we just weren't ending up in the same places or whatever it might be.

And then I read that and I read that you were struggling and so I send you a Facebook message and I basically said, "We haven't even had a conversation yet, but I want you to know that I am here for you as a friend and if you want to either A, hang out and talk about stuff, I'm totally down for that or B, hang out and not talk about any of this stuff at all and just go do something like go for a bike ride or go for a hike, I'm also your guy." I had no idea if you were going to respond to that or if that would be something where like, "Should I do it or not? Will that make her feel uncomfortable? I don't know, but I'm going to do it anyway."

So, I reached out and then you responded immediately with a super sweet message and you were like, "Yeah, that'd be great." So, I remember we just took a walk to go rent bicycles and then I learned that you had this whole wine background and all that. I was like, "You know, the wine on the island is not great, but ..." I know you're not trying to do all this social stuff and go out with all these people to a bar and this kind of stuff, but I said, "I'll find the best bottle of wine they have on this island and you and I can just sit on the beach and we can just drink a bottle of wine on the beach with nobody else around. If that's appealing to you, let me know and I'm your guy."

I remember that you hit me back and you were like, "Let's do that"

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... a bottle of wine on the beach.” So, then I made good and I went out and I shopped around and I found ... Because good wine in–

Brooke: So, the 7-Eleven and what was it, the Oxo?

Matt: 7-Eleven, whatever’s there. Good wine in Thailand is not easy to find, but I got whatever the best bottle was that they had and–

Brooke: The Pepsi of wine.

Matt: Whatever the best bottle of wine that they had on this island in Thailand was and you and I spent an incredibly long number of hours on the beach just sitting there at night drinking through the bottle of wine and talking and that’s when we really connected and it was an amazing evening. It was one of the days in the entire Remote Year that I remember most vividly was the night when we did that. It was amazing.

Brooke: Well, I have incidentally since had a halfway decent couple glasses of wine in Thailand from Thai wineries that do exist – believe it or not – but you have to go to the higher end restaurants in Bangkok or whatnot to actually find them and even then, they’re not great, but they are at least solid. So, it does kind of. It’s really just not designed to. Thailand’s not designed to grow wine. But yeah, when I put that post out, I remember just kind of feeling that I had gotten to a point where I was so tired of the hustling, the bullshit of pretending everything was great, and just the mask that I had worn for so long.

At that point, it had been I mean really since I moved to New York probably in 2008 is when I felt like that mask truly went on because – as soon as I was on my own, living in New York, surrounded by so many massively successful, important, and ambitious people – you take on that energy and you realize that, “Well, okay. I’m here. I’m in a place with more opportunity than anywhere else in the world. So, I have to fit in. I need to survive here.”

So, you view all of the more sensitive – at least I viewed all the more sensitive part of me, all of the ones that felt weak or questioned my situation or weren’t even sure if I was where I needed to be – I viewed those as liabilities that needed to be squashed. It was an unconscious choice, but I had the mantra of,

“If you can make it here, you can make it anywhere” always stuck in my head and I thought to myself that if I can’t make it in New York – and I never felt like I did. I was in the city for eight years before I left for Remote Year. I never felt like I had even entered the doorway of “making it in New York.” That felt like such an inherent failure.

And then getting this opportunity to travel around the world – which was the dream in so many ways – but, for me, it started off just an absolute hell and it stayed hell for a really long time. Some of it had to do with – I mean a lot of it had to do with – my situation in getting off the drugs, but a lot of it just kind of being this unraveling of everything I had built myself upon and how I viewed myself and the world. So, I just remember in Thailand specifically like Kuala Lumpur was just this onslaught of sensory information that I had to deal with.

Then you get to this beautiful, tranquil island in Thailand where a lot of that sensory stress was gone, but it was like when you just pull the floor away and it’s time to drop. I didn’t know what to do with that either because that was when I really felt like I was left with who I was and, who I was, was scared and terrified and lost and I had no direction. I had quit my remote job in Malaysia. I was worried about finances. I didn’t trust anything I knew about myself because nothing was the same now that I was off the drugs and I didn’t trust anyone who was around me because I didn’t really know anyone and it was so ...

I felt like I was having such an emotional experience and there were so few people that I would trust to actually bring into that and people I’d known for six weeks just simply weren’t on that list. But at the same time, that’s when I was able to ... that was probably my rock bottom I would say was in Thailand and once I was able to start digging my way out of it a little bit and starting to see the little glimpses of the people who were around me and that’s where you came in and where we had a very private experience away from the craziness that was Remote Year.

I needed to know that was going to be possible in order for me to keep going with the experience we were having because I needed the quiet moments of connection. So, that’s what I started chasing while I was traveling was that. It wasn’t the parties or the massive success in my job while I was traveling. It was the quiet moments

of connection where I could start to learn more about who I was.

Matt: Yeah. You know it's interesting just sort of contrasting. There are two nights that stand out as two of the greatest nights in the entire year of Remote Year. In Remote Year, of course, there are a lot of really great experiences, but two of the great nights – like single days or single evenings – that I remember centered around you. One of them was our night on the beach in Thailand where we just sat out for four or five hours just drinking wine on the beach until the wee hours of the morning until I got super starving and then I was like, “Brooke, I’m starving.”

Brooke: Didn't I make you a sandwich?

Matt: Yeah. You're like, “There's nothing open, but I have peanut butter and bread in my refrigerator if you want to come back to my place and have a peanut butter sandwich.” I was like, “That would be amazing.”

Brooke: Yeah, and I made you a PB and just a PB. There was no J.

Matt: No, I told you no J. But I don't do jelly, so I was like, “Just peanut butter.”

Brooke: I don't think I had jelly.

Matt: So, then I was like, “Oh, my gosh. You're my hero.” And then I ate a peanut butter sandwich and then we sat there talking for two more hours – sitting on your porch or something.

Brooke: Yeah, on the balcony, yeah.

Matt: Then – all of a sudden – it started pouring rain and it was just – all of a sudden – came out of nowhere a torrential downpour. Then that was right when I had to walk back to my place and it was somewhere between 3:00 and 4:00 in the morning because we'd been talking for six hours. And then I was just like, “All right.” Then I just ran back to my place, which was not that far but – when I got back – I remember I took a selfie just to send it to you because it was drenched through every single piece of clothing I had and it was hilarious, but one of the most memorable nights.

The other one though on the countervailing side – which also

centered around you – was a group night which was in Lisbon, Portugal when your episode of Chopped was going to air. This is the Food Network show, which is a cooking competition show between chefs.

Brooke: Right.

Matt: And you had said to us, “I was a contestant on Chopped and my episode is going to air tonight.” We were all in Lisbon, Portugal. Now Lisbon, of course, is about six hours ahead of East Coast US time. So, the episode was going to air at–

Brooke: 10:00 p.m. on East Coast time.

Matt: Yeah, East Coast time, and so it was 4:00 in the morning Lisbon time. You sent out some sort of message to say, “Listen, guys, just so you know my episode on Chopped is airing live tonight. I was a contestant. I was a competing chef on this episode.”

Brooke: I was not the most popular person on the trip at that point because who wants to hang out with the crying girl the whole time?

Matt: And you put it out and you said, “My episode is airing at 4:00 a.m. It’s going to run from 4:00 a.m. to 5:00 a.m. Anybody that wants to watch it live with me, we’re going to have it set up and have a projector and we can – in this massive living room of this co-living space – and anybody can come and watch it.” And the vast majority of our group –

Brooke: So many people. It was like 30 people.

Matt: They all came out to watch it live.

Brooke: I felt like such an asshole when everybody showed up because I really was not the best. I was not being great in the community during my time. I look back on it and I completely understand why I had such a rough time with Remote Year and I have plenty of self-compassion and understanding of why I was there and also regret just not being able to get myself to a place where I could have truly enjoyed the experience for as much as I could have.

But I know that I wasn’t the most social person, I wasn’t always the most positive person, and I didn’t think anyone was going to

get up at 4:00 in the morning on a Tuesday or something. When everybody showed up, I just felt like I was both so grateful and humbled, but also crouched into my little corner on the couch just almost embarrassed by the fact that there was such an outpouring of support for me despite the fact that I was not always the best member of the community.

Matt: A hundred percent, but that's what's really, really also very important. This was six months into the program and this is what I tell people about Remote Year, right?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: Which is that there's going to be a whole range of diverse types of people in the community. There are a lot of very different personalities you know, but whoever is the farthest end on the personality spectrum from the type of person that I might say, oh that's the type of person I would be "friends with."

If that person is going to be part of an intentional community and they're going to care for me and be part of a community that I'm in for an entire year – every single day, day in and day out – I am going to care for that person no matter what, right? But this is part of my outreach for you, right? You and I in Thailand hadn't even had an extended conversation yet, but the fact that I knew you were in that state, "This is someone that's in my community who is struggling. I am going to reach out and be there for that person." So, when you put that out and the whole squad rolled out.

Brooke: It was so cool.

Matt: It's like 3:45 in the morning and the room is packed. It's Tuesday night, right?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: I mean it was just unbelievable.

Brooke: I knew that I had won, but you guys I couldn't tell you. You guys had no idea.

Matt: That was the amazing part, right? Because you had signed a confidentiality agreement or whatever, you obviously can't tell the

outcome of the show before it airs live. So, you couldn't tell us what happened. All you could say was, "I'm a participant" or "I'm a contestant on Chopped and the show airs tonight." So, we're there. It's 3:45 in the morning. We're excited, we're ready. 4:00 it comes on. We see you. Everybody cheers, right?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: They're yelling and cheering for you. You're there. And then you start doing the competition thing, right? And then as you do better and better in the competition, everybody's going crazy and then – at the end, of course – you win and the place just goes bananas. It's 5:00 in the morning. We were all on our feet screaming, giving you a standing ovation in Lisbon, Portugal ... amazing.

Brooke: Yeah, it was really cool.

Matt: Amazing. So, so amazing. That's Remote Year for me. That's the community. That's what it's all about. Can we use that to transition back a little bit to just your chef journey?

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: Maybe start with what happened with your ballet path and dreams and how did you decide to pursue a culinary path and then talk a little bit about the bakery and the New York experience and how that led to Chopped.

Brooke: So, cooking had been really the only activity that I had done consistently throughout my entire life. I've always been a person who starts something, gets really into it for a period of time, and then I feel like I learn enough and move on, but cooking kind of stuck. My mom does not like cooking and she made that pretty clear. She's not a bad cook, but she didn't like it and so I just got tired of having the same four or five meals for years and years and years and finally just decided to teach myself.

On top of all of that, I was not the coolest or the most popular kid and I realized that when you bring people food they like you more. So, it was a very easy way to just be like, "Hi, friends. I have cookies." And you do that enough times and eventually, people start coming back. So, I realized the power of food really early on. And then I was also a dancer and so there's such a pressure to be

thin – self-imposed or otherwise – and I’m naturally a little bit more muscular than your average ballet dancer and I’m short as well.

So, I had to work twice as hard to make my lines look long and lean, but I loved food. So, I would make food because I was interested in it but then wouldn’t eat it myself because I felt like it would negatively impact my dancing career. So, I needed to give it away. So, I kept doing that all throughout high school. I even took a recreational – it wasn’t quite a recreational – it was one of the vocational culinary programs in high school. I went through all of that and then I broke both my feet when I was 18 dancing. So, I broke first my right foot in January of 2004 I think and rehabbed my foot. My very first class back, I broke my left foot.

I mean it was just like this massive sign from the universe that dancing was not going to be my future career. It was not even going to be a part of my hobbies. So, I went to college and I continued cooking for social reasons and because I liked it in college and then 2008 rolled around and I needed to figure out what I was going to do in my post-college life and most everyone around me was going into Goldman Sachs and finance and whatnot – coming out of an elite, liberal arts school in Vermont.

They went to New York and Boston and I figured, “Well, I can always do that” because I mean this was at a time when it didn’t matter what you majored in, you could get a job at Goldman Sachs if you wanted to. So, I figured, “I can always do that, but cooking is the only thing that I’ve really been interested in. So, why don’t I go to culinary school and see if working in the food industry and being a chef is for me?”

So, I did that and I started working in a restaurant at the same time that I was actually in cooking school and, inevitably, 2008 rolls around and the whole market crashes and suddenly there is no other chance of me ever getting a job in the finance industry or in business and I was kind of stuck in the decision I had made and that was in the food industry. So, I was making \$7.50 an hour I think in a major Manhattan restaurant and I would get overtime and that was an odd blessing to make time and a half off of \$7.50 and I did that for about a year because that was suddenly the only thing I was qualified to do.



Then I went to another restaurant in the city where I made \$90.00 a day for a 14-hour shift and it was exhausting work and I felt like it wasn't sustainable and my body was in a lot of pain and – most importantly – I realized I didn't want to be an executive chef in a restaurant. So, I left the kitchen world and I started working for a food startup and then I went and made wine on Long Island and then I came back and I was on unemployment for a while. I started working in catering kitchens and then I just had this idea one day that sort of dropped into my head where I was like, “People like cupcakes. People like booze. What if I make alcoholic cupcakes?”

I was just so bored. I mean there are only so many times you can apply for jobs before you run out of things to do on a Tuesday and so I would bake in the meantime because it was cheap. It was a cheap way to entertain myself. So, I started creating this line of boozy cupcakes and – in the meantime, I had met my future business partner who was a bartender – and it was a cute idea to have a chef and a bartender making boozy cupcakes.

So, we just blindly skipped down to the courthouse and got our documents, which you buy at the gift shop with a Snickers bar because we had to pay with a credit card and they had a minimum and the documents cost \$2.00 and the Snickers bar cost \$2.00 and they have a \$5.00 minimum or something. So, that's how the business started. I mean it was the most unsexy, unplanned way to start a business, but we had a product that people inherently got a kick out of and it was really high quality since I had spent so much time around really good food.

So, I didn't want things to be pink and yellow and full of sprinkles for the sake of being bright and colorful. I wanted them to be with natural ingredients and made with really bold, but natural, flavors and to taste just like a cocktail when you bit into it. I didn't want it soaked in vodka just because we could. So, we made a very sophisticated product that has been traditionally marketed to children and it was kind of at the ... the peak cupcake hadn't quite happened yet. We hit our stride right as peak cupcake season was happening in New York and then – because our product was different enough – we were able to sustain that.

So, basically for the first year, I just became an expert at effectively lying and ran a business out of my apartment and would bake hundreds of cupcakes out of my Manhattan apartment kitchen

and people would be like, “Where’s your commercial kitchen/?” We’d be like, “Oh, we rent a place, totally legit, I swear.” We did that.

Our first client was Google and I just talked my way into that and eventually, we opened up a brick and mortar shop on the Lower East Side in Manhattan and – for the next five years – that’s what it was. It was teeny, tiny little \$2.00 cupcakes and figuring out how to create a business around that. And then somewhere in there, Chopped fell into play. I met the casting director and she was like, “Oh, you should apply for Chopped.” I was like, “I make cupcakes. I don't think it’s the same” but it worked out.

Matt: And you published a cookbook.

Brooke: Yeah, we did a cookbook as well. So, there’s a cookbook called Prohibition Bakery that was published by Sterling Epicure in 2015. That is theoretically available in bookstores nationwide. I’ve been in some Barnes and Nobles that have them and some that don’t, but you can definitely get it on Amazon if you’re still interested.

Matt: You can definitely get it on Amazon and we’re going to link it up in the show notes for sure because ... boozy cupcakes.

Brooke: It’s a beautiful book. It’s a great gift and it’s a perfect book to put on a coffee table or something because it’s super pretty and – if you ever just want to impress somebody with a boozy cupcake – it’s a great way to go.

Matt: It really is. It’s a great conversation piece too because people do a double take. They’re like, “Boozy cupcakes?”

Brooke: Yeah.

Matt: And then it’s this really sophisticated confectionary product. That’s amazing. So then the Chopped idea came in front of you. You decided to pursue it. Then how was that experience? Can you give us a little behind-the-scenes on Chopped, what was it like, how did it go, that sort of thing?

Brooke: Yeah. So, the best things in my life have come out of deep boredom and frustration and that’s exactly how Chopped happened is I was just I mean I was proud of the business that we built but –

as soon as it became just a manufacturing business – I got bored really fast. I liked the building, I like the branding, I like creating. I don't like maintaining. I know that now but – at the time – I didn't know it and so I was just looking for something else to do just to keep me entertained and that's when I met the casting director and she was like, "We're always looking for female chefs on Chopped" and I had been years out of working in a traditional kitchen environment at that point.

I had been making cupcakes for five years. I didn't feel like my qualifications or my skills were up to par, but I was so bored that I was like, "Sure, let's do this" which then leads to exactly how I ended up on Remote Year. So, I actually applied for Chopped and there was an extensive round of...There was your initial application and then you had to do a series of essays and they brought you on for an on-camera interview. I actually found out in the same week I got my acceptance to Remote Year and I got told that I was going to be on Chopped and I had an immediate meltdown because it was also the same week that I started detoxing off of all the drugs.

Matt: Wow.

Brooke: One week in March, all three of those things happened and my response was just uncontrollable tears.

Matt: Wow.

Brooke: So, because I was convinced that I was going to embarrass the hell out of myself on Chopped and take down everything that I had built and I suddenly knew that I had to leave the country and all these things and traveling. So, I did a lot of emotional preparatory work for Chopped, as well as running test shows with my friends. I would have them show up to my apartment with baskets of mystery ingredients and they would time me and we would actually run through mock Chopped-style dinner parties and it turned out to be tons of fun, but – on the actual shoot day – it's all filmed in one day. It's a 14, 15 hour day.

Our call time was 5:00 a.m. at a Starbucks across the street from Chelsea Piers. I didn't get home until about 11:00 that night. You meet everybody else at the Starbucks and shake hands and a producer comes over and then you walk across the street and they

take away effectively everything you own – like all your phones, everything has to go – and they put it all in locker and you don't see it for the next 14, 15 hours and then you're just at the mercy of whatever production wants to do with you. If you need to pee, you have to ask permission and be escorted.

You eat when they tell you to, you stand when they tell you to, you interview when they tell you to, and then you go on the soundstage when they tell you to and you cook. And it really is just like you see. I mean you have the time is not fudged. It's not made up. You've got 20 minutes and 30 and 30. The only little tidbits that you wouldn't expect are, for example, when you see people all lined up on the four stations, it actually makes a difference where you randomly get placed on each of the four stations because if you're the closest chef to the judges, you have the benefit of actually getting to hear the chef's banter as you're cooking.

So, that can be great when you have a mystery ingredient that you have no idea what to do with and they tell you like, "Oh, if you're working with salsify, you need to peel the salsify" and you don't know what you're looking at because it looks like a stick and you're just like, "Oh, shit. I guess I better peel the salsify" and then you can do it right. On the other hand, if you're all the way on that end, the pantry and all your refrigerated ingredients are a solid 20, 30-second walk away.

So, in such a limited amount of time, you're wasting almost a minute of your time every time you go to the pantry. On the other hand, if you're in the position that I was in – which was all the way on the end – I couldn't hear anything that the judges were saying. So, when I watched the final episode and the cut and I do something stupid and I hear them covering their eyes and groaning over something dumb I did, I'm glad I didn't hear that but – on the other hand – it may have helped me to make smarter decisions. But I didn't have to worry about just running to the pantry for a quick five seconds grabbing what I needed.

So, that was a very interesting component of the setup that I realized would matter in some capacity. Yeah, then you get your dishes judged and it gets edited down to a few seconds effectively per person, but our first judging – when we had all four chefs there – took over two hours. Each chef had 30 to 40 minutes of your food just getting ripped apart on camera. So, it takes a lot of

physical and mental fortitude to stand there and take it and not just want to scream back like, “You have me in this ridiculous situation. Of course, that sucks.” But you have to be professional and realize you’re on camera at the end of the day.

Matt: And eventually, you ended up winning.

Brooke: Eventually you win in spite of all that, yeah.

Matt: Right, right. Now, okay, so if people actually want to see your episode, where is it available to see?

Brooke: So, I am Season 32, Episode 5 or 6, I believe. It’s entitled Chocolate Obsession. It was the Valentine’s Day episode. It aired on February 6, 2017, I think. I know you can find it on iTunes or Amazon Prime and every time I go on a plane now – which is frequently, Chopped is very frequently on syndication – and I check the little Chopped situation and I’m watching the seasons creep up over time. The last I checked, it was on Season 27 or something and so there’s going to be a day when Season 32 becomes syndicated on every airplane in the world and you can watch me make some questionable culinary decisions in the air.

Matt: Well, what I’ll do is we will link up to it in the show notes.

Brooke: Yeah, okay.

Matt: So anybody who wants to watch your Chopped episode, we’ll put a link in the show notes to where they can find it and stream it or–

Brooke: We can do that. In case you don’t find yourself on a television that has my episode on it.

Matt: Exactly. So, we will link that to the show notes just [www.TheMaverickShow.com](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com). You can go there and you can see exactly how to watch Brooke’s episode of Chopped. So, all right now what I want to do is ask you a little bit about – just to go back to the personal growth through the travel period – and particularly the concept of the self-compassion therapy that you eventually found and began practicing. Can you talk a little bit about that – the concept of it, the implementation of it – and basically how you connected with that?

Brooke: Yeah. So, I had – since I was thrust into the world of psychology and psychiatry at 15 – I have been through a wide variety of methods and techniques over the years and I always found that traditional talk therapy and psychiatry was just never really quite for me. I'm sure there are certainly good psychologists and psychiatrists out there. I was just not fortunate enough to have them and I, instead, experienced the much more negative and destructive side of the industry. So, when I decided to get off these drugs, I went to a traditional psychiatrist and I followed her protocols exactly and yet I still had this very extreme physical reaction to getting off these drugs.

So, I decided that if I was going to get through this, I needed some outside help. I knew that 100%, but I decided to go in a very nontraditional route. So, I started working with a man named Edward Mannix – who founded something called Compassion Key – and it's remote counseling that's all done over the phone on purpose because – for a variety of reasons – but one of the ones that were most beneficial to me was that I always found it so frustrating and awkward to have to physically go to a psychiatrist's office or a psychologist's office and be in their space and sit on their couch.

They would be 10 feet away from me with a clipboard or whatever and to have this very constructed conversation about things that didn't feel simple and certainly shouldn't be limited by 45 minutes and \$300.00 an hour or whatever it is and then to have to drive home and switch from, "Okay, I'm going to spend the next 45 minutes in a place of extreme vulnerability and then – as soon as I walk out your doors – I need to put my mask back on and go back into the world." That never felt good to me.

So, this was something that I could do over the phone in my own apartment wherever it was all over the world – because I did it all throughout traveling with Remote Year and since – and when I was done, I could roll over and go to bed or take a shower or have some tea or whatever it was and it just made a huge difference in the way I was able to actually approach the work. So, so much of what Edward does and how we worked together was based in this idea of self-compassion and it's become a huge part of the work I'm doing now and especially when we tie it back into breath work and back into the ice baths or whatnot.

I think our body is a huge communicator. It tells us where things are going wrong and what we need to pay attention to before our mind is able to catch up. So, I think we can use our physical reactions to things whether or not that's ... A great example is when you get that email and suddenly your heart starts to race and you feel like your chest is contracting and – even though nothing has truly happened to you, you're in a safe space wherever it is – your entire physiological and mental body has changed. An even greater example is a nightmare. Literally, nothing has happened. Everything that has happened has happened in your own head and yet you can have a really extreme physical reaction.

So, so much of Compassion Key actually takes these physical reactions and asks you to really pay attention to your body and where the stresses are in your body and then to send those parts of your body that are hurting or – if it's, for instance, you may even have a visual in your head or something that's intangible – you send it compassion using the words, "I'm so sorry ...". And through this process, you ultimately begin to heal the parts of you that are wounded and therefore manifesting as a problem in your life. So, a really good example that I can use is eating disorders, for example, because that was something that I experienced in my teenage years and going all throughout college.

That can be blamed on a million things like whether or not it's the ballet or whether or not it's the trauma of losing my dad or just the pressures of being a young teenage girl in America, whatever you want to put it on. There was a pressure to be thin and I felt it and I found very unhealthy ways to deal with that. But, for me, it was also deeper and, for me, I always just had this feeling of wanting to take up less space. So, I had – in working with Edward very early on – we're working together and we're just talking about what I was feeling in my body. This was also going all throughout the withdrawal. So, there was a lot going on and I could really pay attention and point out things that were going on.

I had a very strong feeling of constriction in my throat – almost like I just wanted to scream at the top of my lungs – and so we started working with that. As we're going through this process of self-compassion, I started seeing this almost like movie playing in my head of this woman who was wandering through a desert and I don't know what this is. I mean it could be a million things. It could be my brain creating a metaphor of what I was feeling. It

could just be an amalgamation of images that I've seen in my life. It could be a past life if you really want to go there. I don't know, but I had a very clear image in my head.

So, the way this process works is he might say something like, "I'm so sorry you're starving" and then I would have to repeat, "I'm so sorry you're starving" and he would say, "I'm so sorry you're alone" and I would say, "I'm so sorry you're alone" and it's this kind of Marco Polo style phrase and response that would go on and go on. Ultimately, as we go through this process, this image in my head started to change and I just had a distinct feeling that this image in my head – this person – had been abandoned and left by the people that she loved and the more we dealt with it, the more I realized that she had fallen to her knees in my head and she was so hungry.

She started shoveling sand in her mouth and she actually choked on the sand in my head and died. I'm seeing all this happen in my head. I have no idea where it's coming from. I'm in Manhattan at the time just in my apartment just talking to this man on the phone. So, we keep sending self-compassion to this creature in my head and ultimately I just connected it to all of these eating disorder tendencies throughout my entire life of the need to fill myself with something in order to feel rooted in this abandonment that I had felt. Looking back on it, there seems to be a pretty clear connection of losing my father and the emptiness of that and the abandonment.

It seems obvious now but – at the time – I had no real way of expressing it and yet this particular process had brought it all up. So, again, we just send self-compassion to this person. "I'm so sorry. I'm so sorry you died tragically. I'm so sorry they didn't come back for you. I'm so sorry you were left to die alone." Even though it wasn't relevant to anything that was happening in my world or my reality, it felt deeply, deeply, deeply relevant to my soul.

And somehow in going through these phrases and sending myself all of this love for this thing that had no basis in any part of my life, it was as if we were able to heal and stitch up these deep emotional wounds. So, it was almost instant that I felt like all of the eating disorder tendencies and whatnot just disintegrated and lifted just because I was able to finally address it in such a nontraditional, metaphorical way because, for me, it was never



enough to root it to what had actually happened in my life. So, that was one of my first experiences with Compassion Key.

In realizing the power in that experience, I have since been able to apply it to all the experiences and traumas in my life big and small. So, even if it's something like I'll come back to the email that I got a few days ago where I had to use some of the breath work and – in addition to doing the breath work – in order to help calm my physiological body down, I did a short five minute Compassion Key session with myself where I was saying like, “I’m so sorry you were taken advantage of. I’m so sorry you didn’t know the rights words to say.”

“I’m so sorry – even when you thought you did the right thing – it was still wrong” because those were all of the feelings that I was feeling in the situation and what I’ve realized is – by taking whatever I’m feeling and turning it back on myself but sending myself this compassion for the mistakes that I have made or might make – it actually diffuses the situation and it starts to calm me down. It helps me gain control and it also helps me to understand that a lot of these feelings and whatnot are perhaps unfounded or – even if they are something that is real – I can kind of heal that as soon as I pinpoint what it is.

We get so angry so much in this world and you see this all of the time with Trump. People are so angry at what’s going on in the political energy of this world, but I think that this is just unearthing all of the crap in our body and in our minds that we need to deal with. So, once you are able to look at a situation that happens on the outside and say, “What is this bringing up in me and how can I heal that?” Once you are able to find a technique that can heal this for you and, for me, it’s Compassion Key. It could be a variety of things for other people.

For me, this is what it is, but as soon as I’m able to pinpoint these feelings and health them through Compassion Key or whatever it is, then suddenly what’s happening in the outside world does not send me into these spirals of emotional bullshit that negatively impact my whole life.

Matt: Can you talk a little bit about travel specifically and how the experience of world travel to very different countries, very different cultures, interacting with very different people, having

very different experiences because you've traveled very extensively over 30 countries? Can you talk a little bit about what travel has meant to you personally and how that dovetails with experiences of personal growth?

Brooke:

So, I think there's almost nothing better than isolating yourself from your regular life if you can where you have your stressors of a partner or your job or the city you live in, your family, whatever it is. When you take yourself out of that environment and put it in one where none of those typical players exist, shockingly or not shockingly all your problems are still there and it's because – at the end of the day – all these people and things and experiences in your life that you think are the ones that are causing the problem are really just bringing up all of this crap in you that needs to be healed.

So, when you do the kind of extensive travel that we did – when you're gone for more than a week when you're in different cultures and you're surrounded by strangers all the time – you start to realize that, "Oh, my problems are literally coming with me from place-to-place-to-place-to-place." I think at that point, you have a choice where some people say, "I guess this is just part of who I am and I have to manage that" and then there are other people who say, "I guess this is a great opportunity for me to fix this."

For me, what I found is that in each country we traveled to, it was this sadistic little gift that was given to me that was just like a pretty package of whatever issue I really needed to deal with which that particular country happened to specialize in. So, in Malaysia, it was noise specifically and crowds. I've really had to work over the past few years at becoming more and more okay with noise and certain noises in particular – like construction noises – which nobody likes to walk next to a jackhammer, but I can have a jackhammer be 10 blocks away and there were times in my life where I still couldn't handle being 10 blocks away from that sound even if it wasn't particularly disruptive to everybody else.

So, I spent most of my time in Malaysia dealing with the fact that – no matter where I went – there was this noise that I had to learn how to filter and manage and I was working with my counselor the whole time on noise issues very specifically. When I got to Thailand and suddenly everything got quieter, I suddenly started having a lot of panic. And one of the things that I was doing is I

was scuba diving and getting certified and I had actually dived multiple times before – probably four or five times as a Discovery diver – so that was something that I was familiar with, but still, that was always medicated.

So, when I suddenly was off the medication and I started diving, I started to panic while underwater – even in a pool – because I just suddenly had this realization that I was breathing underwater and it was not at all natural and – what I once defined as fearless – I suddenly realized was just numb because I really didn't care at that point whether or not I lived or died. So, the fact that I was doing something so unnatural and that so many things could potentially go wrong was just something I was able to brush off. Where – once I wasn't medicated anymore – I suddenly had to realize, “Oh, my God the whole world is literally out to kill you. You can die at any point.”

That was the first time I'd really realized that because for so long I was just numb to the whole idea of death by a coconut falling out of a tree or getting eaten by a shark or whatever it was. In Thailand, it was like the whole island was trying to kill you. So, you know people were getting Dengue left and right and getting bitten by rabid dogs and all these things and, suddenly, I was just like, “Holy crap. The world is dangerous” and I had to deal with that.

When we went to Cambodia, I met a guy and I had my first relationship not medicated and that was a whole different experience of feeling all of the physical sensations that come along with that and I hadn't experienced that since I was 15 and that was just bizarre and then so on and so forth everywhere we traveled. What I realized through all of this was just that I had massive amounts of wounding and trauma that needed to be healed and each place I went it was just like, “Here you go. Here's the next thing we're going to deal with.”

So, I understand that a lot of people don't have an opportunity to just up end their entire life and go on a walkabout for however many months and get to experience this, but the reality is that this is happening to us every day in our regular lives. Every time we run into that person who triggers us in a way we don't like or every time we have to see our in-laws and they piss you off or every time someone does something politically that makes you really upset,

all it is is information in your body that's telling you what needs to be healed.

Matt: Wow, all right. Brooke, at this point, are you ready to move into the lightning round?

Brooke: We're going to lighten it up a little bit. I mean yeah, sure, let's do it.

Matt: Let's do this.

Announcer 1: The lightning round.

Matt: All right. What is one book that you would most recommend to people – maybe one that's particularly influenced you a lot?

Brooke: I think The Power of Now by Eckhart Tolle was arguably the most influential book for me and it was just one of those books where I actually read it in Prague and it helped me pull out of ... It was my way out of the deep withdrawal. It was the first time that I started to realize like to feel like myself as more than just a mind.

Matt: Awesome. What is one app or productivity tool that you're currently using that you'd recommend?

Brooke: Okay. So, there's an app called White Noise and so as someone who is massively sensitive to sound like I'm fine with the conceptual flying on an airplane. I'm not scared of flying on an airplane, but the idea of babies on an airplane makes me want to jump out of it. So, the way I have figured out how to get around this, it's a combination of three things. All right so you need Bose noise canceling headphones, you need silicone earplugs, and you need the White Noise app – that's the name of the app – specifically on brown noise.

You put the earplugs in, the headphones on. Then you connect the White Noise app with brown noise and it is the only thing I have discovered in almost two years of traveling around the world that will cancel out babies on planes.

Matt: Wow.

Brooke: Yeah, life-changing.

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Matt: All right. Experiencing everything that you've experienced in your life so far, now if you were able to go back and give one piece of advice to your 18-year-old self, what would you say to 18-year-old Brooke?

Brooke: Oh, poor 18-year-old Brooke. Yeah, so there's this part of me that just wants to pat her on the head and say like, "Oh, that's sweet. Good try." You know I don't think I can tell 18-year-old Brooke to go off the meds because I don't think she would have listened and I don't think we were in a place in society to really even have a different option. But I think I probably just would have assured her that like, "Whatever decision you make today is not necessarily a lifetime decision."

So much about the past couple years of travel has just been this realization that you're never in a position you can't change and I think I definitely didn't know that when I was 18. I thought that everything was definitely going to determine the rest of my life and that's not the case.

Matt: Awesome. If you could have dinner with one celebrity or author or public figure – anybody who's currently alive today – who would you pick?

Brooke: Probably Tim Ferriss. It hasn't been from his entrepreneurial side that I've really connected with what he has to say, but I think we have similar ways our minds work and we're both obsessed with the body and fitness, but also the work he's been doing in mental health and pushing that conversation forward is really important to me and I would love to share my information with him and learn what he has to say about it too on a personal level.

Matt: Awesome. What is one cooking or baking hack or tip that you would share with the audience?

Brooke: All right. So, if you're someone who just doesn't know much about cooking or you are single and you cook for yourself and you just want to make your food a little bit better, I would say try adding a little soy sauce instead of salt no matter what sort of cuisine you're cooking because ultimately soy sauce is just salt, but it also has this lovely deep, umami flavor to it. And so if you add a couple of drops of soy sauce into Italian bean soup, it's

actually going to brighten it up and add a depth of flavor that would be very unexpected, but don't overdo it. Just add a couple of drops or go by taste. You can use soy sauce in so many different types of cuisines – not just Japanese or Chinese.

Matt: Awesome. Okay. Of all the places that you've traveled, what are the top three places you've been that you would most recommend other people must visit?

Brooke: Oh, that other people visit?

Matt: Or they could just be places that are particularly special to you. I guess those are sort of two different questions. So, you can field it however you want, but what are your personal top three travel destinations for you?

Brooke: Well, I've recently become obsessed with Memphis to the point of really hoping that there's a time in my life where I'm going to get to live there and I don't know why. It's a little behind the times. I mean I think it's cool, but I'm certainly not someone at the edge of what's cool in this society. I just like that it's a little behind. I like that you can go see music on a Monday night wherever you are and everyone's really nice and the food is great and there aren't a lot of skyscrapers, which makes me happy after living in New York for so long. So, I'm obsessed with Memphis. Internationally, I felt the most myself in Lisbon and I think Portugal is underrated in comparison to the rest of Europe.

On the other hand, I feel very defensive of it in a way that I'm just like, "I don't want everyone to start going to Portugal because then it will change." But you should probably go to Lisbon and eat some cod and drink some wine. Oh, God, and a third place. Yeah, maybe Banff in Alberta – not necessarily Banff the town but just Banff National Park – and leaves and the pure geography of that area of Canada is, I think, the most stunning landscape I've ever seen and it just makes me feel like the world is singing. I think it's hard to see negative in the world when you're in front of those mountains, so probably that.

Matt: That's amazing. I have never been there, so I'm putting that on my list.

Brooke: Come, they say.

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Matt: I would love to, of course. Okay. What are your top three bucket list destinations that you've never been that are currently highest, most exciting places on your list you want to go?

Brooke: So, it's interesting. I feel like I've traveled enough now where I am almost more interested in going back to places I've been under a much different mindset and I was lucky to go back to Thailand this past year, which I had a totally different experience not being in this just completely emotional disaster of a place. So, I would love to go back to Cambodia because I felt that there were parts of Cambodia that were really pretty stressful to be in and I've since been back to Mexico a few times and very similar and I just see more of the beauty in it there.

Also, I mean – just as I was saying – the Loire Valley in France and some of the little French towns with wine and whatnot. I've also been very interested in Nepal. Okay, so we'll say the Loire Valley, Nepal, and you know probably God, just like some Podunk town in the middle of the US. I think after traveling to a lot of parts outside of the US, I've been so much more interested in the wide-ranging geography – and especially after going to Memphis – and I'll just talk about my love of Memphis all day long. But it just made me realize there's so much in this country that I really haven't seen.

I've never been to Colorado. I've never been to Yosemite or Yellowstone and I would really love to see a lot of what's in the US. So, I would say just the middle of the country in general. Give me a car and a week and I'd be very happy.

Matt: Awesome. Okay. Last question and then we're going to tell people how they can get ahold of you and find all the stuff you're up to. The last question is what would be one tip or recommendation you would have for how people can better practice self-compassion in their lives?

Brooke: So, I would just say look at whatever issue is coming up. Say you're just very angry about something. Whether or not it's something that is tangible – like you know exactly why you're angry or perhaps you're just angry – go take a shower. I'm a big fan of doing all of this in the shower because it's personal and shower thoughts are a thing. You just are kind of open to the

universe or your higher self or whatever religious thing if you want to go there.

Whatever it is, we feel open in the shower. It's why we get so many good ideas with the water falling on us. I would just look at whatever your situation is and verbally, out loud, throw the phrase, "I'm so sorry" in front of whatever your issue is. Put it in the past tense. "I'm so sorry you were angry. I'm so sorry you acted in a way that was unprofessional. I'm so sorry you didn't know what to do and there were bad consequences." It doesn't matter how stupid you feel or how trite the statements sound, but just think about pouring whatever compassion you might give to your own kid. Imagine your own kids who are in a terrible situation and you're just saying to them, "I'm so sorry you're in this situation."

Put that level of compassion into the phrases that you give yourself. Do it in a private place when you're taking a shower. Don't really work about where it goes. If it gets weird or if you start to see things in your head and even if it's completely intangible and doesn't have anything to do with your situation at hand, just let it go where it wants to go. If you want to get emotional, get emotional. You're in the shower. Nobody's there. Just try and – I'm not even going to ask you to love yourself – I'm just telling you to have compassion for yourself. Just start with that.

Matt: That's amazing. Okay. I want to tell people first of all how they can follow you and pay attention to what you're up to because you're up to some pretty cool stuff. I want to also leave this with a couple of teasers about some projects that are in the works that I'm super excited about. But let's just start with where people can find you on social media or if they want to connect with you, how do they follow you?

Brooke: So, I'm most active on Instagram. So, that's just @BrookeSiem – just my name. It's B-R-O-O-K-E, S-I-E-M. And then my website is just [www.BrookeSiem.com](http://www.BrookeSiem.com). That's a good place to find – at the very least a way to get ahold of me – or perhaps what I'm up to and the latest. I'm not much for Twitter. You can reach out to me on Facebook. I'll see it, but I don't update Facebook that often.

Matt: Yeah. Instagram is the place to be because you are also – as I mentioned briefly in passing – an insanely talented photographer



and so your Instagram feed–

Brooke: I don't do too much of that lately though. I pulled back.

Matt: Listen, just scroll through her Instafeed and find some amazing photography there.

Brooke: You can find it if you look.

Matt: And find some amazing photography there. But by following you on social media and checking out your stuff, they'll also get updates on things that you have in the works when they're ready to come to fruition. We mentioned in the intro that you're A, working on your memoir.

Brooke: Yes.

Matt: And B, you're doing this Cooking with Grandmas project.

Brooke: Yeah, my grandmother project.

Matt: Which we haven't even mentioned and maybe you can just say a little bit about what that is that's in the works because it's super amazing.

Brooke: Oh, you know the grandmother project – Cooking with Grandmothers – we don't really have a true working name for it. It's just a project I started while I was traveling partly because I wanted a little bit of a break from the emotional bullshit in my own head and I love cooking. So, I wanted to cook with grandmothers and learn about these older, traditional – mostly I focused on desserts from all around the world – and get to know the women behind them.

So, I started doing this just as a private, personal project and it has developed a little bit into a point where we had a film crew come down and we did some cooking in Oaxaca and we're going to put it together and hopefully turn it into something, but I don't know what that means yet. Best case scenario, Netflix is like, "Yes, here's half a million dollars. Go do this." Another scenario could be that we create a really cool YouTube series or a short documentary or something.

- Matt: Right, right.
- Brooke: But at the end of the day, there's so much information and insight from that generation of women and if your grandmother is still alive, go just make some cookies with her and ask her questions.
- Matt: And where can people learn more about Extreme Performance Training?
- Brooke: So, XPT you can learn about at [www.XPTLife.com](http://www.XPTLife.com) and that is X, the letter X, and you can also find them on Instagram @XPTLife and then you can always email me and I'll answer questions because we do workshops and there is an assortment of XPT coaches all around the country. There are about 75 of us right now. So, there's a chance there's someone in your own city who's doing some of the XPT work. At the very least, I could probably connect you to someone in your area who's doing it.
- Matt: Awesome. So, we're going to put all of this information in the show notes. So, you just go to [www.TheMaverickShow.com](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com) and you'll get all of Brooke's contact information there, XPT stuff, and all of the other things that we mentioned in this episode. Brooke, thank you so much for being on the show.
- Brooke: Thank you.
- Matt: This was amazing.
- Brooke: Thanks so much.
- Matt: Goodnight everybody.
- Brooke: Night.
- Announcer 1: Be sure to visit the show notes page at [www.TheMaverickShow.com](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com) for direct links to all the books, people, and resources mentioned in this episode. You'll find all that and much more at [www.TheMaverickShow.com](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com).
- Announcer 2: If you like podcasts, you will love Audiobooks and you can get your first one for free at [www.TheMaverickShow.com/Audiobook](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com/Audiobook). Whether you want the latest bestselling novels or books on investing, business, or travel, try your first audiobook for free at

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Announcer 3: Would you like to get Maverick Investor Group's white paper on real estate investing for digital nomads, how to buy US rental properties from anywhere in the world and finance an epic international lifestyle? Just go to [www.TheMaverickShow.com/Nomad](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com/Nomad). The report is totally free and available for you now at [www.TheMaverickShow.com/Nomad](http://www.TheMaverickShow.com/Nomad).

**[End of Audio]**

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