

**Matt Bowles:** On this episode, I am actually going to pass the mic to my very good friend, Kristin Wilson, and I'm going to publish one of her interviews from her podcast, [Badass Digital Nomads](#). So, in this episode, instead of hearing me interview the guest, you are going to hear Kristin Wilson, Eric Prince. Now, if you have not yet met Kristin, she has been a guest on The Maverick Show four times. She was one of the pillar episodes. She was episode #03 on The Maverick Show, and she has since returned to The Maverick Show three additional times and for very good reasons. Kristin has been a Digital nomad for 15 years. She's lived and worked in 60 countries. She is the author of the book, *Digital Nomads for Dummies*. She is the host of the YouTube channel: Traveling with Kristin, which has over 150,000 subscribers. And she is the host of the [Badass Digital Nomads](#) podcast, which has published over 200 episodes, including the one you are about to hear right now. So please enjoy Kristin Wilson interviewing Erick Prince on the [Badass Digital Nomads](#) podcast.

**INTRO:** Hi everyone, Kristin Wilson from Traveling with Kristin here and welcome to episode 107 of Badass Digital Nomads with Erick Prince, the minority nomad.

I first came across Erick a few years ago, thanks to the YouTube algorithm that served me a video that he made about what he doesn't like about being a digital nomad. And I actually avoided clicking on it for a long time because it seemed like a bit clickbait. But when I finally gave in and clicked, Erick totally delivered on the title. What he said really resonated with me. And I really connected with him, and I've been following him online ever since. And he had no idea who I was, but I eventually tracked him down and convinced him to come on the podcast. It's been a long time in the works, but it is well worth it.

Originally from Cleveland, Ohio, Erick is an extremely talented self-taught photographer and photojournalist, but he's also a serial entrepreneur. He has a marketing company. He does work for massive brands. He has another company that's undisclosed and he's just a badass. He's also an extremely experienced world traveler who first traveled the world in the U.S. military before he dropped out and decided to travel on his own terms and do his own thing. And he's been to almost a hundred countries so far. And he's also on a lifelong mission to become one of the first African Americans to visit every country in the world. He's such an interesting person.

And in this interview, Eric sits down with us from his long term adopted home in Bangkok, Thailand. And he does not hold back. He gives us an insider look into the expat lifestyle there and actually the local lifestyle and how to actually integrate into your community as a foreigner in a real way, like really become a part of the place that you move to.

We cover a lot of ground in this interview, so I don't want to give anything away, but it's raw, it's unfiltered, it includes a lot of profanity. It's like when you meet someone, and you just hit it off and you're talking for hours, or you go to dinner with a friend that you haven't seen in a few years and you're catching up on things. I feel like I could have talked to him for four hours actually. So, because this was a two-hour interview, I decided to split it up into two episodes.

Part one today focuses more on how he ended up in Bangkok to begin with, his upbringing in Cleveland as the oldest of 10 kids, and how stumbling upon a few old issues of National Geographic sparked his desire to travel. We also talk about how his serving in the U. S. military changed his global perspective.

And then next week in part two, we're talking more about travel; travel tips, travel stories, fitting in in the world, and finding your place and finding your community abroad. I hope you enjoy this episode with Erik Prince, one of the most badass people I've ever met on the internet. And see you all again next week.

**Kristin Wilson:** Erick, welcome to [Badass Digital Nomads](#) podcast. You are the epitome of a [Badass Digital Nomads](#). So, I'm so excited to have you at the show today. Welcome.

**Erick Prince:** Oh, thank you so much for having me. I apologize. It took so long for this. What were you talking like three months trying to get this together? It was a long one.

**Kristin Wilson:** I know. It's tough with the Thailand time zone and the East Coast time zone, but it always works out in the end. And yeah, give us a bit of context as to where you are right now.

**Erick Prince:** I am currently living in my home of Bangkok, Thailand. It's interesting when people talk about me being location independent, but I'm not really. I live in Bangkok. I've lived here for seven years. I just happen to be a travel journalist and I'm always on the road. So, everybody thinks that I'm living in all these different places around the world. When I'm actually not, my bed is in Bangkok, Thailand. And so, when COVID happened, everybody thought I was stuck in Thailand. But no, I chose to, this is my home. I chose to be here.

**Kristin Wilson:** You were going to be there anyway.

**Erick Prince:** I was going to be here anyway.

**Kristin Wilson:** I heard on another podcast that you were friends with some Michelin star chefs in Bangkok, and I'm a huge fan of All those, like, cooking shows on Netflix and Chef's Table. Specifically, I saw an episode about a chef in Thailand there. Do you know who I'm talking about?

**Erick Prince:** It's Gaga.

**Kristin Wilson:** Probably, yeah. Are you friends with him?

**Erick Prince:** Yeah, yeah. We know, you know, the funny thing about those shows, and I've been here a lot. I was like, I'm old. I'm an OG here. Like, like, Chef Tone. All the, like, these are close personal, Jared Risley, like, Bola, like, these are all friends. We've been friends before Michelin even showed up. So now that everybody is like, they're Michelin chefs now, they haven't changed. They're the same amazing people as they've always been. I think those of us who've been here this long are blessed to be able to have these relationships in this city. And that, you know, when you come here, I can introduce you to Chef Tom or take you over to see Jay Phi and give her a hug, you know, like it's, it's just an absolute blessing to be here. It's brilliant. You wait till you get back. It's amazing.

**Kristin Wilson:** So, I love Bangkok, but the last time I was there, I was with my friend who works for, she was actually taking a job with Google. And it was kind of her last hurrah before she went to go work with Google. So, she was on a work trip to the Philippines and, you know, being location independent, I just met her over there in Manila. And then we ended up exploring Thailand and we loved Bangkok, but neither of us had ever been there. And so, it was kind of like, I don't know I think when you travel by yourself, it's different, but traveling with her, we kind of get stuck together. And then when she went back to the U.S., I just continued on exploring like the whole country, um, by myself, but I didn't have any local connections in Bangkok at the time.

And then I just kind of went with like no itinerary or anything. So, I'll be really excited now that I have so many remote friends that live in Thailand. I'm really looking forward to going back and seeing a different side of it. And you have been to, is it almost 100 countries now?

**Erick Prince:** Yeah, 95

**Kristin Wilson:** 95 countries. Why Thailand? Because I lived in Costa Rica for eight years. So, I know what it's like to get to a country where it feels like home and then you stay. So, after going to so many places, what was it that attracted you to Bangkok? Or was it this kind of just invisible force that resonated with you?

**Erick Prince:** You know, I think it's a combination of everything. You know, I was in the military for 10 and a half years and I was blessed to travel around the world. Wanderlust wasn't a thing for me. Everybody talks about wanderlust, but it's not wanderlust, it's my life, my way of life. It's just the way it is. It's not something I've always looked at wanderlust as this thing that you seek. Like this inspiration that just pulls you and this wanting of a far-off land. For me, it was never that. Like, I've been traveling since I was 17.

So, the world is So living abroad has always been an important part of my identity. It's just what makes me comfortable. The issue always was finding a place in the world that I was comfortable in general, where the things that I love and enjoy are accessible. There's no place in the world like that outside of Bangkok. None. There is not one place in the world that offers as many things that I enjoy as Bangkok, Thailand, the quality of life is so high. It's difficult to describe to people how high your quality of life is here, especially when you don't adhere to certain Western perspectives on how life should be lived and how, you know, relationships should exist, how money should be allocated, how infrastructure should work.

I just take things the way they are here in Thailand, and this is the way things are. I'm malleable that way. All right, cool. I like it here. Like, this is a great place to be. So, you know, back to what you said earlier, there was this force. Every time I landed at Savanna Puram airport, I felt like I was home. Everytime I smelled durian, I got excited. Or I saw an orchid, I knew exactly where that orchid was from. It's just certain things, like when, when people say anything stupid about Thailand, I would get internally upset. Like, it was my home.

**Kristin Wilson:** Yeah.

**Erick Prince:** So, it was, it was always this thing. Thailand is a place that will welcome anyone. if you allow it to. I know a lot of people who don't like Bangkok, for example, because they don't understand it, how it moves. It's the same. Bangkok is only comparable to New York City. The exact same things that people say about New York City is the same thing that you will say about Bangkok, Thailand. Either you love or hate it. That's it. And the locals are a special breed, especially when you spend time amongst them, and you see how they think because it's entirely different than anywhere else in the world.

**Kristin Wilson:** Yeah, you got to kind of go there to experience it. But the quality of life is super high, the food is amazing, the cost of living is low, the city has this very dynamic energy that it has, you know, it comes across in movies and things like that too. But then yeah, there's also this kind of je ne sais quoi that happens when you find your place in the world that is kind of inexplicable, it like defies logic and words. And actually, both you and I think that Lisbon is overrated.

**Erick Prince:** Oh my god.

**Kristin Wilson:** But there's places that on paper are really good, or you think that you're going to really love, and then you get there and you're like, this is not what it's cracked up to be.

See, and then there's also subjective. Like I avoided Paris for years, probably a decade because I thought it was going to be so cliché and overrated. And I completely fell in love with it. And then there's places that I wasn't excited about going to, like the Balkans, that I ended up really loving for some odd reason.

And then you hate the Balkans. So, it's like everyone, there's some places that we probably agree, like this place is overrated. This place is amazing. And then there's other places that people disagree about, but that is the beauty of being able to choose. And you said on another podcast, I don't believe most people are born where they belong. And so, is that related?

**Erick Prince:** Well, it's a gift, this lifestyle. You're going to notice I call being a digital nomad a lifestyle because I think we have to change this narrative that being a digital nomad is a job. It's a thing to us, but like, no, it's a lifestyle.

**Kristin Wilson:** I call it a mindset.

**Erick Prince:** Yeah. Oh God. Yes. You know, definitely a mindset. This entire thing that we do is a blessing not because it's that difficult of a lifestyle, I do not believe being a digital nomad is a difficult thing to do, right? Once you set your mind to it and start putting things in motion. It's not a difficult thing. I think the hardest part about this lifestyle is getting away from programming. This sedimentary programming that we have in a lot of cultures where you have to stay within the same little bubble that you were raised in, where everybody looks the same.

Everybody thinks the same. Everybody goes to the same school. You get a job nine to five, you spend 30 years doing the same job and that's your entire life. And it's like most people, we are nomadic creatures, human beings. We are some of the most creative, adventurous animals that ever created, and we waste it. Our entire lives we wasted and it's like the more that I traveled the world, and I interacted with Europeans. Because Europeans are different kind of animals than North Americans are. And I was like, my God, he said, yeah, I'm 25. I've been to 72 countries. Like what? How is that even? Wait, what unicorn are you?

And it's like, when you grow up, we all have those things about where we're from that we hate. Like, this doesn't make any sense. Why do we do it this way? Or those things about our religion. Like, this doesn't make any sense. Or things about how romantic relationships are formed. Like, why would I do that? I don't like that. Instead of just being miserable and unhappy, get out there and explore and find the place in the world where you do belong. where things do make sense. There are aspects of a lot of different cultures that we all can learn from and just kind of adopt those things into who we are as people. It's frustrating for me because I care about people.

When I see or hear or read things online or talk to friends or interact with people from back home who can't see beyond the borders who can't see what's what else is out here for us, especially as a person of color. And I always say I get in a lot of trouble within my community for saying this. How many times do we have to be shown and told that that country is not for us anymore?

They don't care. And I don't want to go on a rant about this, but over and over and over again, decade after decade after decades of abuse. Like there's never been a better time in history to just leave, to go to one of the other 191 countries to build all who you have in the world and build a life, and it's easier, it's simpler.

You know how many people I know here who have been teaching English, teaching English without a college degree for 25 plus years? A lot, a lot of people live comfortably here. If you make around 2,000 U.S. dollars a month in Thailand, depending on where you live, you can do whatever you want. I live in Bangkok, I barely crack 1,500 a month.

I live in one of the most expensive places, it's two places. It's Phuket and Bangkok, the two most expensive places here. And I live in one of them. I barely crack 1,500. You can imagine everywhere else. So, it's like, for us, who, those of us who've lived overseas and explored the world, to be all these countries, we begin to quickly understand that there's a lot of times we're not born in a place that we belong because our spirit wants us to go somewhere else. And I think that is what wanderlust should be described as. That search for the place in the world that you truly belong. Not just aimlessly wandering.

**Kristin Wilson:** There's like this inner, stirring, like a turbulence that happens. And people sit in that discomfort because I think there's a, a weird disconnect where we're genetically programmed to want to belong and be a part of the community. But yet, the U.S. is a really toxic community in a lot of ways. There's so much wrong with it, but then there's no clear alternative. And by leaving the country, we basically become an outcast of that society. And then there's a gap between where you don't fit in. In your home country, but you haven't yet found your place yet in the world.

And that is the scary part for people. But if you can just push through that and get to the other side, it's like this relief, like this kind of breath of fresh air, where all of a sudden you have this clarity over looking at the birdcage almost. of the U.S. and you're like, oh, if I could just tell more people that they can get out of it, like you don't have to be a martyr of that system and suffer for your whole life and then become bitter when you get into your 60s because you're like, ah,

**Erick Prince:** Perfectly said. I mean, it's so many martyrs. So many martyrs. It's a very real conversation in my community. Like, as an average people can't see me. I'm an African American man. But, you know, with the rise of everything that's been going on in the past, well, it's been happening to us, you know, 38 years, my entire life at least, right?

But with the more recent visibility, of the abuses that people of color experience in the United States. There's been a push. There's been an internal struggle within our community with those who decide to become on the ground activists and those of us who live abroad. It's very similar to what happened with James Baldwin, when James Baldwin was living in Paris.

And James Baldwin, I'm paraphrasing here, he said something to the extent of, Paris is the first place I felt like I was being treated as a human being. Where he was able to be openly black, openly gay was his time in Paris. And, you know, of course he came, he was, uh, around during an entirely different, during the Civil Rights Movement. And to Medgar Evers and Malcolm X, Martin Luther King, those are his close friends. It's similar to what we're dealing with today. It's those of us who are people of color from the United States who live abroad. We are bystanders as well now. Like, you go from being actively abused and oppressed every single day to being outside of the U.S., watching your community be actively abused and oppressed.

And then the question becomes, what do you do? How do you help? And, you know, and this isn't just within our community. And, you know, I know other people deal with it. You know, you deal with the mental health crisis. You deal with the lack of access to education. The lack of access to health care. It's baffling, especially when you go to so-called third world countries, and you see them do things significantly better

for their people. And it's like, we're supposed to be the greatest country on the face of the planet Earth. We have the nerve to tell other countries what to do.

Yet, we can't do simple things to take care of our people. We can be. We can be all those things we pretend to be, but we choose not to be. And other places around the world just do.

**Kristin Wilson:** It's all lip service and propaganda. I think there was a moment. Where I had been out of the country for probably two or three years where all of a sudden it just kind of sunk in that I had to stop looking at the world through that lens. It was like wait, that is a flawed Worldview I need to just start over with the clean slate. Let's just assume that everything I've been told is wrong or is up for debate. What next? And that was around 2007. And I just went down this real deep rabbit hole of trying to figure out what life was about, how geopolitics worked, was the U.S. really the best at everything? And to just looking at it like what it was, was kind of brainwashing.

And you said also in another podcast that Americans our basically our perspective is manufactured and created. So, you asked when you left that environment, who are you? And that's where you start with that clean slate. So, can we break down what is the manufactured lie or set of lies that people are told? And then how does living abroad dismantle that?

**Erick Prince:** You know, it's difficult because there are out and out lies, right? There are flat out things that are not true. But then there's manipulation of perspectives. I think the United States is more guilty of manipulating perspectives. That, you know, people of color are only poor because they choose to be poor and they're lazy. There are a lot of lazy people of color. That's a verifiable fact, just like there are a lot of lazy other people, though. And you also fail to show the systemic abuse that these people go through, right? When you say, when you have a conversation about education, you say, well, why can't you just pay for your kids to go to better schools?

Well, this guy, his entire family was working in the steel mills in the Midwest. And then the economic crisis hit. He's 42 years old. He's been working there for 20 years. And then there's nothing to replace those jobs. How's he going to pay for his kids to go to school? To a private school? Or go to a university? That's frustrating because you have countries that have experimented with things like UBI. That places like Germany where college is free. Places where higher education is called education.

**Kristin Wilson:** Yeah

**Erick Prince:** If you get sick, you don't go bankrupt. This idea that overall, the overall American narrative, right? You ever see, uh, read a book on Animal Farm?

**Kristin Wilson:** Yeah, back in high school.

**Erick Prince:** You should read it again. Read it again. I read Animal Farm once a year, every single year.

**Kristin Wilson:** Oh, that's a good idea. I need to read it

**Erick Prince:** Every time. It gets better every year. It's amazing how the book just gets better over time because it's like, my God, how did he see this coming? How did he recognize that this is exactly what the United States of America will be in 2021? So, when, when you step back, when, when you step back, outside of the American bubble, you got to remember, I was a soldier, ten and a half years I served in the

United States military. I love and still love my country. I bled for it. I fought for it. I love it. I vote in every single election. I'm a happy, proud American.

But being a proud American means you have to question it. You have to stand up when we're wrong, and we're wrong a lot. And you have to say the things that need to be said. You have to stand up for people who don't look like you, who don't have the same life experience as you. When people tell you, hey, this is messed up for me, listen, when you get out of the U.S., you take off all those blinders. It's easy in the U.S. I grew up in Cleveland, Ohio. 99.9 % Black. Everybody of the authorities that caused a problem in my life at that time was white. Police officers, teachers, social workers. Every position of authority was held by somebody white in my entire life, growing up.

So, my perspective of race was totally skewed. We, there are certain areas and neighborhoods you don't go to because I grew up in East Cleveland. University Heights, that's where white people are. Shaker Cleveland, you don't go there. You might get jumped or arrested. That's the very real life there. New York is a better example.

We've seen all over the history of television and film. There are certain neighborhoods you don't go to if you're a certain color. So, the way the U.S. reinforces these things, it does nothing to combat them. It does nothing to combat these issues that we have with abuse.

**Kristin Wilson:** I think it's because these people are in power, well, there's a lot of reasons for it, but also, they don't have the worldview either. Like it kind of starts at the top.

**Erick Prince:** Oh, I think they do. I disagree. I think they do have a world view.

**Kristin Wilson:** You think so?

**Erick Prince:** I think they realize that an educated and united populace would throw every single one of their asses out of office. There's no way.

**Kristin Wilson:** It would. I mean, I think that this is going to change the electoral map, these new migration patterns. But do you think there's going to be a brain drain away from the U.S. now that so many people can work online?

**Erick Prince:** I don't think so. We've been talking about this topic for over a year now, about how the rise of digital nomads. I just did a documentary that should be coming out later this year, specifically about digital nomadism. I do not believe that it's going to be a significant shift as people believe, or as people are claiming and hope. Sure, there will be an uptick, because there are a lot more people who are in a position where they have nothing to lose. But there's still this, there, A, there's still familial ties. Family is strong, strong, strong, strong.

There's familiarity. If you fall on your ass in the U.S., you can get back up because you know it. You know the culture, you know history, you know identity, you know the word, you know language. It's relatively simple. And there's still fear. There's still fear of the unknown. There are a lot of people now, granted, like me and you know each other online, we might meet someday. There are very few people who know somebody personally like you and me. So, my family could say, hey, I wish I could move abroad and live abroad. Oh, I know somebody who did that. My brother did it. My son did it. And my cousin did it. Let me call him or email him or message him.

A lot of people don't have that. So, they end up in my inbox. And my inbox fills up or they go directly to the spam folder or any of the other hundreds of digital nomads around the world creating content, right? So, I don't think that there's going to be this massive shift, um, that a lot of people believe it is. I think it's going to become a lot more normalized. I don't think we'll be seeing these magical unicorns anymore. But I don't believe that there's going to be a massive brain drain. Reality is the U.S. is still a great place for a lot of people. It is. It's getting significantly more difficult to be overnight success as they say there. But I mean, for me, I still think it's one of the best places in the world to be born. I am so glad to have been born an American.

**Kristin Wilson:** That's true.

**Erick Prince:** All things being equal, if I had to do, if I had to go home, I would go home, and my life would be perfectly okay. Going all the way back to the original point you were making, I don't think this will be a massive brain drain. I just think, uh, there's just, it's just going to become more normalized for somebody to say, hey, yeah, I work online overseas.

**Kristin Wilson:** So, let's go back to your beginning because I know that you grew up in Cleveland. I know that you were in the military for 10 and a half years, but did you always have this drive to travel and see the world?

**Erick Prince:** The interesting thing about Cleveland is Cleveland Prepared me for international travel, and I went back and did a project there once it was 2018? 2017-2018. It was kind of like this, uh, you know the prodigal son returned to Cleveland was working with the tourism board and being a tourist in the city I grew up in.

And that's when I realized how much that city prepares me to explore the world. Because I don't like a lot of places in the world, even though where I grew up in the area was 99.9% black. Cleveland is a very diverse city. So, I was exposed to a lot of different cultures from around the world. Um, when I went to Poland for the first time, they were shocked I knew pretty much everything about their food. Because I grew up eating Polish cuisine and Hungarian food. Like goulashes and pierogies, like baklava. I grew up eating that. Like, I love sauerkraut and cabbage.

**Kristin Wilson:** This is so crazy because my family is actually from Cleveland and my grandfather's Hungarian.

**Erick Prince:** See?

**Kristin Wilson:** So, my Italian grandma and my Hungarian grandpa met in Cleveland.

**Erick Prince:** Yeah, it's an amazing place for culture and diversity. So, I show up, this young black kid, and I know everything about their food. And it opened that door. So, my exposure, my, my exposure to travel was Cleveland was being a curious kid in Cleveland. Like, oh, what's a kolache? Like I see this word, like, what is this?

And you go in and you just fall in love with it. You know, I was, I was babysat by a woman from Estonia. And it was funny. I'm pretty sure she was Estonian. I'm old now. So, uh, I can't exactly remember. But she would give it to me, she was older, she had to be in her 70s then, and I would take out her trash for her. She would take it to the garbage can. Before I took ours out, I had to go and take hers out to the curb and then bring it

back after I got home from school. And she would leave me a box of National Geographic's and Reader's Digest. from her husband's collection who had passed away. And these were old issues.

There was never a new issue. I was reading 15, 20-year-old issues, like the early runs of National Geographic. And I was seeing, you know, I saw my first pair of boobies in a National Geographic.

**Kristin Wilson:** I think I saw that same National Geographic.

**Erick Prince:** Like, oh, what's this? Like, it was like, growing up and seeing those things, I was aware of the world outside of where I grew up. I knew it existed. And this is before the internet. I'm 38.

**Kristin Wilson:** We're the same age.

**Erick Prince:** We grew up before there was an internet, before everybody had a smartphone.

**Kristin Wilson:** Encyclopedias from the grocery store and National Geographic. That's pretty much how I learned about the world.

**Erick Prince:** I lived in the library. I lived in libraries because I would just. So fascinated about the world. Um, and I think my desire to see it came from That from all those different cultures around me Influencing me and in my family being my family was never I never had anybody in my family tell me that I couldn't do something like my family If anything they put undue pressure on me to be great.

It was like I grew up in a family where I was expected to be exactly who I am today, where it was, for me to be mediocre was, it wasn't even a thought in my head growing up in my life. For me to be average, it's not even an option. From the day that I was born, I was told I was great.

**Kristin Wilson:** Do you have brothers and sisters?

**Erick Prince:** Yeah, nine of them. I'm the oldest of ten.

**Kristin Wilson:** Oh my gosh. Are they still in the U.S.?

**Erick Prince:** Yeah, yeah, yeah. They're all there. Um, and uh, my mother did a fantastic job. Oh,

**Kristin Wilson:** We're both the oldest siblings. Yeah, yeah.

**Erick Prince:** Cool kids, man. We're the cool kids club. And it's like, that wanderlust, as you call it, or that's travel spark pushed me to the military. I really wanted to be a fighter pilot. I wanted to fly around the world and that's what I wanted to do. I just want to fly fighter jets all around the world. And then when I was a kid, when I was 16, I had a son. And that changed the trajectory of everything. So instead of going to college, I decided to join the military because I had a son to take care of.

So, um, I joined the U.S. military, U.S. Air Force. And, um, my plan was to get commissioned as an officer in the U. S. Air Force. So, I was like, well, I want to be a fighter pilot. I might as well become an aircraft engineer. So that's what I did. I became an aerospace maintenance technology engineer. Basically, if it flies, I can fix it. Even to this day, I can fix pretty much any airplane in the world. I joined in January of 2001. Out of nowhere, 911 happens.

**Kristin Wilson:** Oh yeah.

**Erick Prince:** Yeah. So, I instantly became MP basically, security forces, because I was young, and I was a marksman, and we were understaffed then. So, they cross trained me. So basically, I was trained as a crew chief, but I was also trained as an MP.

**Kristin Wilson:** Like the born identity sort of thing, like secret agent.

**Erick Prince:** Oh God, no, not quite. Not at that level, but um, so I would, a lot of my deployments were with the army either way. So, I was working on the C130. You've probably seen it in all kinds of movies and video games. Um, it's the four-propeller airplane.

**Kristin Wilson:** Okay. This is another weird coincidence, but I actually looked into joining the Air Force. I went to this Air Force ROTC meeting in high school because I was trying to figure out a way to travel. And so, I almost did that too. So that's really interesting that that was your gateway. So, you're working on this plane and what types of countries were you assigned to?

**Erick Prince:** So, the early days, one of my first Turkey was one of, I was based in Turkey. I was based in Germany and Ramstein, Okinawa. I was, oh my God, I love Okinawa. I was basically Okinawa and Korea. So, all my overseas assignments were, I mean, just like being home. It was the best part of being in military, but in between those was obviously the Middle East, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, throughout my 10-and-a-half-year career, basically out of 10 years, I would have to sit down and calculate it. I wouldn't say after 10, outside of 10 years, I was overseas for about six and a half of those.

**Kristin Wilson:** Okay.

**Erick Prince:** Out of ten and a half years, about six and a half were overseas.

**Kristin Wilson:** And then were you able to retire after ten years?

**Erick Prince:** No.

**Kristin Wilson:** Is that how it works? Or how did you get out? Oh, I just left.

**Erick Prince:** I was done.

**Kristin Wilson:** Oh, so are you getting like a retirement fund from the military?

**Erick Prince:** No. You get that at twenty years. At 10 years, 10 years is the point where you either decide you're going to stay in forever or you're going to walk away.

**Kristin Wilson:** Okay.

**Erick Prince:** That's pretty much what happens and uh, for me, I was done. My mind, my soul, my body, I couldn't watch what we were doing anymore. I couldn't be a part of that because I saw some things. I was at the beginning of the war. The very worst part of the wars, I was there, in the desert. So, I couldn't see that anymore. So, yep, I just called it a career. I had about 10 years.

**Kristin Wilson:** What is the collective mindset like in the military? Because I imagine you go through this training that must kind of be like education on, like American education on steroids because your kind of behind the scenes.

So, there has to be an element of, you know, U.S. pride and service to the country and fighting for these causes. But then when you really see what's going on after 10 years, like, is the morale kind of okay, we see what's going on, but we're doing our duty. So, we're just going to put our heads down and do it anyway and get through it and stay fighting for the cause.

Or do people, does it become transparent to people in the military where they are demoralized and jaded in any way by whether it's upper management of what's happening or whether it's the politics of it or the government, because I think like a lot of people get out of the military and then they stay silent on all everything that they heard and saw and did. What is that like?

**Erick Prince:** You know, I believe it goes a lot for everybody's extremely different on this because I think initially when you come in your belief system, whatever it is, becomes reinforced. If you believe the United States is the greatest thing of all time, that's easily enforced. If you think it's some bullshit, it's easily enforced. Like it's the very, the first two years reinforce everything you already believe. And it just makes it even stronger. But as time goes on, especially when you start to get into become an NCO, you gain rank and get authority over other people. You start to develop a perspective on what we're doing because you get to make those calls.

You get to make those choices. You get to advise on the best course of action, and you start to see things in this gray area. The United States military operates in an extremely gray area of morality. If you have a moral compass, oh, God is going to be tested. It is really going to be tested in the United States military. And that is really why a lot of people get out and a lot of people stay in because, you know, for me, I no longer believed in what we were doing in those conflicts. Not even a little bit because as time went on, I became more educated outside of the military and going to college as well as seeing things and being able to ask questions like, wait, what?

Like that's not at all what's going on or when you hear news reports and you know better because you're there and there's even, there were so many times when we were in the desert watching the news being reported and we're just laughing like they have no fucking idea what's going on. And then it becomes scary because you're like, wait a minute. I never knew what the hell was going on. And when I leave this, I won't know what's going on. So, it's so difficult, the reason it's such a difficult question is because everybody's different. And I can only speak about my personal experience on this. My experience. I will always say that joining the U.S. military was the best thing I ever did in my life. And the second-best thing was leaving the United States military.

**Kristin Wilson:** Yeah, it's like, it's got to be so disillusioning and also unbalancing. And enlightening at the same time. Because reality is so subjective there. There are so many aspects to what's happening.

**Erick Prince:** Well, see, I don't think reality is not subjective. Reality is not subjective at all in that case. I mean, it slaps you in the face where reality really is. Like, news reportage is subjective. That's what's subjective. How things are reported is subjective. How things are is not subjective. A motherfucker is trying to kill me. There's nothing subjective about that. That's true. I don't particularly care why. Like, we can talk about that later. All I know is this guy over there is shooting at me. Okay? So, things become very crystal clear at that moment for you.

What becomes difficult is the question, do I want to contribute to this? Do I want to contribute to what really is happening? The death, the abuse, the greed, the lies, the manipulation that we all know. We're well

beyond that point of, oh, we didn't know. We're well beyond that point in history. We all know what we're doing. We all know where we're wrong. And we're all choosing to be quiet about it or to be vocal about it.

We're all making those choices, and I'm not judging anybody either way. But for me, I chose that I could not be part of that machine anymore. My saying is, leave the world better than you found it. And where that came from was, I was Muslim before. And I was berated by a local in, uh, outside of Bagram, Afghanistan. They, I don't know how he found out I was Muslim. I don't know how. But he berated me for being a Muslim, killing my own brothers and sisters. For And it shook my perspective on faith, on what we're doing and community, and I had to ask myself, and this was, uh, we didn't have an imam there, so I spoke with the chaplain about it, and the question came, do you feel what you're doing is right?

Do you feel you're making the world a better place? And the answer is no, it's not right. We're not making the world a better place. There's nothing about this that's right, and I had to keep that inside because I'm a soldier. I'm out here. Anybody you see who has those doubts vocally, they don't last in a unit that long. By, you know, they're taken care of, or they just can't handle it. So, you keep that to yourself, inside, and it just steams and bubbles. And that can go different ways. It can become negative or positive.

**Kristin Wilson:** How long between when you had that thought, did you leave?

**Erick Prince:** Three years. It was about, yeah, it was about three years. It was about right into my second, yeah, about three, three, four more years left. It was about a year; it was six or seven. I was like, yeah, this is, yeah, this is not it for me. And I dedicated my life to making the world better. However, I see that it's just, just leave the world better than you found it. Because what we have now is.

**Kristin Wilson:** Yeah, and you are. I mean, I would say for everybody listening, like, Eric, I think you know this, but you are so fucking talented. Oh, thank you. Like, you've got this clarity. Your worldview and your sense of self are so authentic and transparent and clear and then you make this matter of fact type of content where you're just telling it like it is which is so rare if you need like millions of followers and then you also have this artistic side where these pictures that you take are so, they're so profound.

Like your photos actually could be a National Geographic of the 80s for sure, like hands down. And then also you're such a good writer. Like your voice in writing is so, it's so easy to read and it's so concise, but it's also, it makes you think. Like you've really got it going on. Like you've got like the whole package. And I'm just curious about, you know, where that comes from. You've started this foundation to help kids with photography. I don't know if this is like a question, but like how did this all come together? Or was it just an unfolding that's happened through your life, or was this a plan where you thought, okay, I'm quitting, I'm getting out of the military and I'm going to go start checking the boxes on what it means to be alive in this lifetime.

**Erick Prince:** You know, honestly, I'm just not a planner in general. I just do things like it was like, uh, it was funny. I think it was like Joker in the dark night. He was like, do I look like a person with a plan? He was like, like a dog chasing his tail. Once I catch it, I don't know what I'm going to do with it. And that's just how my life is. It's just, all right, let's do that thing. That sounds fun. Let's go. And it's like, Eric, you want to try this? Yeah, sure. Let's see what happens. You know, and you know, I think part of it comes from, I've had a lot of positive experiences, and I think people believe in me more. Like it's hard for me to listen to you say those kinds of things about me.

Because I am still, I'm almost 40, I just don't see it. I don't see what everybody's been seeing my whole life. I just don't see it. How everybody, oh, you're special, you're talented, and I'm like, eh, I'm alright, I guess. I just, you know, I just work hard, that's all. And for me, everything that you said, and I'm blessed I've had people my entire life says similar things, those have always come from a simple place. I just work harder than most. I just work like it's my default mode. I do not believe I'm that talented. I just work with people, and I care about anything that I do. I care about it or else I wouldn't do it. I care about the authentic story of a place. For me, the reason photography is my medium, my, it's my muse, all things being, being stripped down.

I am a photographer at my core is because photography is you capture a moment that will never happen again. Like a painting can be replicated, you could, you could redo that, but a photograph, it's a moment that'll never be, you can never duplicate that. I'll be a second order, my subject will be a little darker, a little lighter, a little slower, a little faster, but you can never replicate it.

So, it's, you look at the beauty of that moment for time and you just live in that, you just live there. And for me, those capturing those little moments. It's therapeutic because it reminds me why I keep living, why I keep pushing. Why I was, you know, chosen to survive everything that I've survived and to be able to share that I find it's my responsibility to be able to share this life, this planet, these experiences with the world, because there's so many people who are legitimately stuck wherever they are in the world.

They cannot get out. And if they come across my voice or my photographs or my writing, maybe that could be the thing that helps them get to this point. So tomorrow, my biggest goal is to be the brightest part of somebody's day. Like if somebody has the shittiest day of their life, I guarantee you it will not be the shittiest day of their life if they meet me because I'm going to do whatever I can to try to make them happy.

So, like, like, you, today sucked, but I met that Eric guy. I will never see him again. I might not ever think about the people in your life you met one time, and he left that impression on you. How special they were. It's like, my God, I remember that one girl I met on a beach, right? We talked for 30 minutes and then we never saw each other again. I was at this festival and going to be honest, I was high, and I was sitting on a beach, and I was watching the sunset, and I got into these moments where I got entranced by nature because I hate nature. I don't like it at all. I'm not a nature dude. I don't like beaches. I don't like the forest. None of it.

**Kristin Wilson:** What?

**Erick Prince:** Yeah, exactly. Everybody says that.

**Kristin Wilson:** Well, you live in the middle of no nature. Yeah,

**Erick Prince:** I live in the middle of Bangkok. No nature.

**Kristin Wilson:** Besides the rogue elephant in the streets, which is very tragic.

**Erick Prince:** Yeah. So, we have, so I'll have, I'll sit on the beach, I have these moments where nature traps me, and I can't get out, and I become entranced by it, everything is, I see every blade of grass, I smell every scent on the wind, I feel every breeze, and I was sitting in there. And I saw people walking around.

I just started pulling people to me. I just said, hey, come sit down. And I ended up having a circle of 20 people. And we were just talking about life and, and, and travel and the world and how we got there and

what we're going to do next. And we all sat there for about an hour and a half, just talking on the beach. I'll probably never, this was a, um, a Phuket. This was last weekend Phuket.

**Kristin Wilson:** And last weekend,

**Erick Prince:** It was last weekend. And we left happy. We just left happy. We all hugged, high five, fist bumped, shook hands, and just went our separate ways. And it's like, for me, whenever I create anything, any piece of content I create, I try to bring that across to people.

I try to bring people into the world where I am because I know where I, I know where I, you know, those dark places are. I know how those things feel, how to see death and abuse and pain constantly. I empathize with people in the community I grew up in and communities that I didn't grow up in because I know what it's like to feel hopeless.

I know what it's like to feel abused and ignored. So, I try to make people feel heard and cared about and focused. And hopefully that comes across in my work, you know, really hope it does because otherwise I got to adjust some things.

**Kristin Wilson:** No, it definitely comes across, but you also walk the walk.

**Matt Bowles:** All right. I hope you enjoyed that episode. If you would like to listen to [part two](#) of Kristin's interview with Eric Prince, just go ahead wherever you are listening to this episode and type in bad ass digital nomads that will pull up Kristin's podcast and just go to episode one, oh, Eight of [Badass Digital Nomads](#), and that will be part two of Kristin's interview with Eric Prince.

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