

SEEKING THE EXTRAORDINARY

Ep 11 - Master of Resilience: Joshua Nathanson

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Michael Nathanson: Welcome fellow seekers of the extraordinary. Welcome to our shared quest, a quest, not for a thing, but for an ideal. A quest, not for a place, but into the inner unexplored regions of ourselves. A quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential by learning from others who have done or doing exactly that. May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach.

Join me now in Seeking the Extraordinary. I'm Michael [00:01:00] Nathanson, your chief seeker of the extraordinary. Today's guest may actually be my first non-famous guest. At least at this stage of his life, you've probably never heard of him, but his story may just change your life. It's changed mine. He's only 23 years old, but in some ways, he's lived through more and endured more than any of us might live through and endure in our entire lives.

Our guest was born in 1998 in Boston. He grew up in the suburbs of Boston and from the earliest age was naturally precocious, wise beyond his years and perhaps a bit more serious than his peers, and his ambitions were as large as his personality, which is to say that they were in are large. [00:02:00] His upbringing was in many ways ordinary. If it can be said that someone's youth can ever be ordinary, but we don't specialize in ordinary things in this show, we focus on the extraordinary. Now our guest has been extraordinary in many respects, but to understand that statement, we need to understand his story better. You see, our guest was born with congenital heart and vascular disease.

At the young age of 13, he had to have major open-heart surgery to save his life. Unthinkably, that surgery didn't work. So he had to do it yet again, just as he was turning 14. This time he got better. But because of his health challenges, our guest wasn't able to play football, wrestle, or do some of the other physical activities that he desperately wanted to do as a young man.

So what did he do? He just became a third degree, black belt, and senior instructor in Kung Fu. He became a [00:03:00] competitive, natural bodybuilder competing for the first time, only months after his second surgery. And he focused on his academics. His academic career was in some ways unparalleled, and he eventually graduated with over a 4.0 GPA from Cornell University, a member of Phi beta Kappa.

He got into his first choice for law school, the University of Chicago, where he studies right now, but that's not the whole story. Last December after experiencing several warning signs, our guest got the tough news that he had to have his third open-heart surgery at the age of 22, and that he needed it to happen as soon as possible.

He did. And things seem to get better for him almost immediately after the surgery. In March of this year, however, he started experiencing sharp pains in his chest and back. Those sharp pains, it turns out were symptoms of a potentially deadly aortic

aneurysm, which required emergency [00:04:00] open-heart surgery yet again, for the fourth time. Our guest is now on the mend again, but he has a message for us. It's one of resilience, one of hope, one of strength and one of gratitude. Oh, and there's just one other thing I want to tell you about today's guest. He's, my son. Please welcome the extraordinary Joshua Nathanson.

Welcome Josh.

Josh Nathanson: Thanks for having me.

Michael Nathanson: Well, it's great to have you a what an experience this is for me. I'm going to tell you right now; I'm already feeling a little bit emotional. But I'm really looking forward to this conversation, Josh. So, so let's start with where you are right now. So you're 23 and, given the introduction that I just gave you, do you think of yourself as just another 23 year old? Or do you have a sense for the extraordinary journey that you've been on?

Josh Nathanson: In many respects I do think of myself as an ordinary 23-year-old, but I think [00:05:00] that there's one significant difference, which is that because of the surgeries that have had for my heart condition, I've been incredibly close to death for my entire life, essentially.

And so my relationships, my goals are sort of all seen through that lens. You know, for example, I've, you know, I've been dating my girlfriend for five years and that that relationship becomes incredibly important when, you know, one night you have an aneurysm and there's actually a potential for death and then similarly, I, you know, when I was in the hospital, my parents came to see me. And you just realize the people around you, plays such a crucial role in your life. And similarly, some of the goals that seem important, day-to-day, all of a sudden seem much, much less important. And it just is overall gives you a different perspective on life.

Michael Nathanson: So this concept of having been close to death, [00:06:00] what does that do for your perspective? Do you fear death?

Josh Nathanson: I would say that I dread death having thought about it. I really enjoy living. And so, you know, when something like the aneurysm happens and I'm told that if I leave that hospital bed there, there's, there's a good chance that my heart could stop. You just begin to value the little things in life and you realize that it's just really important to keep going. So it's not, it's less fear for me. And more and more dread, honestly.

Michael Nathanson: Does it make you uncomfortable to have these conversations?

Josh Nathanson: No, it doesn't actually, I think it's really important. You know, I have a tendency to focus on the next step in life. I'm somebody who enjoys challenges. And so for me, it's actually important, I think, to take a step back and think about what's really important and what I currently value. And these conversations about how close I am and could be to [00:07:00] death sort of puts again, puts everything in perspective.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Do you remember the first time you learned you had a heart condition?

Josh Nathanson: Actually, I don't because we knew my entire life that I was going to have congenital heart disease. I didn't really understand it as a kid. I would say that, I'd always been told that at some point way down the line, it would be a problem, but mostly what it meant to me to be perfectly honest when I was 9, 10, 11 years old, is that I couldn't play certain sports.

That's why my heart condition amounted to really just that restriction and obviously it became much more important when I had the first, second, third and fourth surgeries.

But for most of my life in the beginning, at least it was really just a matter of restrictions that I had.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah I remember those conversations with you and you were very much focused on the things that you couldn't do, which in some ways I actually appreciated because if that's what you are worried about and [00:08:00] not worried about having to go through being put on the heart lung machine and you know, going through the, all of the burdens of going through an open-heart surgery to some extent is, is heartbreaking. It was to have those conversations with you. I actually gained some comfort that that's what you were focused on. Do you sometimes feel, why me?

Josh Nathanson: No, I don't. I definitely don't. You know, I think that there's only so much good that can happen to somebody in their life. And for me, I've had a ton of good and very little bad. And if this is the burden that I have to bear that I'm more than happy with it.

Michael Nathanson: No, that's, that's great. Why don't we take a step back Josh, and maybe you could explain for our audience exactly what your condition is and what kind of work you've had to have done on your heart and your blood vessels.

Josh Nathanson: Sure. Sure. So I have a bicuspid aortic valve. So there's essentially just a structural defect [00:09:00] in my aortic valve. And as a result, I had to, when the valve ultimately fails for anybody who has a structural defect like mine, there has to be a valve replacement. And the hope usually is it that bad that'll happen much later in your life when you're 40 or 50.

For me, my valve failed pretty early. And so the first surgery, the surgeons tried to a repair the valve. And then the second surgery, they ultimately had to replace it after, after it had prolapsed. And then in the third surgery, they had to replace it again after the valve failed again and in the fourth, as I'm sure we'll talk about, There was, I had an aneurysm and they had to actually re stitch the valve.

Michael Nathanson: So you had an aneurysm in your aorta and what caused the aneurysm?

Josh Nathanson: So actually there was a skin bacteria that had been lodged in my, in my [00:10:00] valve and that was in part the cause, another cause it seems that there was an issue in the way that it was stitched initially but the truth is, is that the way that the bacteria into my body.

I mean, nobody really knows. Currently I'm on antibiotics three times a day to prevent a similar issue, but I mean we talked earlier about being close to death and this is a good example, I think because the skin bacteria can enter your body, I mean, I'm not an expert in science, but it can add to your body in many different ways and it happens very frequently. And so this is not a remote risk, uh, for somebody like me.

Michael Nathanson: You mentioned medications. So what is your medical regime in terms of medicines you're taking.

Josh Nathanson: So right now, I take an aspirin every day and for triple all to lower my blood pressure, I take antibiotics three times a day to kill any bacteria that can cause another aneurysm.

I take warfarin, which is a blood thinner. [00:11:00] And I do take some pain meds as needed as well.

Michael Nathanson: Okay and how long will you have to take these drugs?

Josh Nathanson: All of my life. I think for all of them, I know that, the blood pressure medication I'll be on indefinitely. Antibiotics is always a risk. So I will be on that indefinitely and same with blood thinners and not the pain meds hopefully.

Michael Nathanson: When you go into these surgeries, it's not, you know, as your father, I haven't really wanted to say to you, are you afraid?

Because I haven't wanted to talk to you about the possibility of death. It's just too hard for me as your father to have that conversation with you. It's hard for me to talk about it right now. Do you feel fear going into them?

Josh Nathanson: Actually believe it or not going to a professional school has changed my perspective on this. I mean, obviously law school and medical school are very different, but one thing you learn almost immediately, when you begin to train to do something like [00:12:00] be a lawyer or a doctor is that these are just ordinary people, and they make a lot of mistakes.

And so when I was young, when I was a kid I didn't really consider the possibility as much of death and it wasn't really until later in my life that I understood that, first of all mistakes had already been made in my case. And those mistakes could be made in the future.

And that there's a, a non-negligible chance of death that I, that I began to really feel some fear. Actually. I remember the night before my first surgery, my brother came into my room and he said to me, have you ever seen the episode of Twilight Zone where the guy wakes up and everybody's pigs, I remember that scared the crap out of me.

Michael Nathanson: It's a great episode.

Josh Nathanson: It's a great episode it's probably the best Twilight Zone episode, but it scared the crap out of me.

Michael Nathanson: Okay. There's a lot of good Twilight zone episodes, but okay.

Josh Nathanson: Well I think, yeah, I thought it was terrifying when I was a kid and I remember thinking what if that actually [00:13:00] happens? So the truth obviously is that, you know when you're 13, 14 years old, however old I was at the time it's, you know, a lot of your concerns are sort of childish, but certainly recently like the concern of a doctor making a legitimate mistake and me not leaving the operating room has been you know, top of mind,

Michael Nathanson: Such a, such a heavy burden for you to have to bear. And yet my sense as you've grown up is that you've always focused on the fact that other people have it worse. Do you remember when the Patriots came to visit you at Boston Children's and what you had said?

Josh Nathanson: Absolutely. So, to the story, the short version of the story is that after I had my surgery, I didn't really see myself as sick. I had known that I was going to have to have a valve repair and then maybe a replacement eventually. And when these ex-Patriots players came to my room, I was a little confused because I thought they only came to see the sick kids. Right. And so [00:14:00] I said, why aren't they with the cancer patients and why are they with me?

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Was that a, a wake up call for you? That in fact you did have something pretty serious that you had to deal with?

Josh Nathanson: I will be perfectly honest. I didn't understand it then, even after having that experience, I still didn't understand it.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. I wonder if that was some sort of defense mechanism.

Josh Nathanson: It's possible.

Michael Nathanson: So, so Josh, one thing that I'm always mindful of when I talked to you, and I think you're mindful of this as well, is that you not be defined by your medical challenges. So let's spend a little bit of time moving away from that.

So from the age of 14, all the way to 22, you had eight years of sure, lots of doctor appointments, but mostly in my opinion, at least from my perspective, a pretty ordinary experience going through high school and college, you want to talk a little bit about those years?

[00:15:00] **Josh Nathanson:** Sure you know I mentioned before that for me the surgeries and the condition were mostly just a limitation of my life in my mind that they weren't much more. And so, as a result, I spent a lot of that time doing activities that I wouldn't probably otherwise be doing. And specifically I spent a lot of time reading and learning. And as you mentioned in the introduction because I, wasn't going to be playing contact sports and team sports. I spent a ton of time learning Chinese martial arts, which I'm not sure I would be doing that either. I still have a passion for it.

Michael Nathanson: And you actually excelled as a martial artist and became a full instructor.

Josh Nathanson: Yeah, that was my high school job, instructor. And it was the best high school job you could possibly ask for, because I spent all day just studying martial arts, teaching martial arts, you know, doing a little bit of sparring and forms and it was just awesome. It was the best job you could ask for.

Michael Nathanson: So when you say martial arts and you say Chinese martial arts, so is that Kung [00:16:00] Fu?

Josh Nathanson: Yeah so Kung Fu is sort of a catch all term for Chinese martial arts. I specialized in Southern style Hung Ga, which was, you know, animal style forms. And as I got older, I started to explore some other areas too. And I actually began to love Tai Chi and internal martial arts generally, and now actually I've found that it's a really good tool for recovery, for building strength.

I mean, you can do, you can build so much strength. I think by just standing, you know, by standing with focus and intent and purpose. And for me it's been really convenient because I can't right now go on a two-mile run and I can't lift weights, but I have been able to continue my internal martial arts training.

And it's been really effective. I really do think that I wouldn't be where I am in the recovery process if it weren't for my training.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. And it, it does seem like Tai Chi and Qigong are great things for you to [00:17:00] continue to focus on.

Josh Nathanson: Absolutely. And I plan to do that. So it's also something by the way, that it's very valuable knowledge. And I've had a lot of people, young people in their early twenties, teenagers, but also older people who just would like to know the secrets of internal martial arts. It's something that's really unique to East Asian culture. There's nothing comparable that I know of in Western culture. And once you've spent 15, 20 years, whatever, studying internal martial arts, it becomes knowledge that very few people, in experience, very few people have. So, you know, I felt really grateful for that.

Michael Nathanson: And you did a little bit of bodybuilding too.

Josh Nathanson: A little bit of bodybuilding, you know, and I still have pictures of me when I was, you know, when I was 14, 15 years old, they're always brought up and they're still on Facebook today, for those of you who are listening and they're friends with you on Facebook, if you want to go check them out. So it's sort [00:18:00] of funny to think about it because I was such a young kid doing that, you know, and you get all tan and you wear the little tiny swimsuit and go on and do it.

But at the time I really wanted build my body and become as powerful and strong as I could. And so I was really proud of what I'd been doing and I was happy to do it.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Yeah. And I think what was special about that is that, you know, the cardiologists allowed you to do it and cautioned you about not lifting too heavy in terms of weights, but you were actually a really good bodybuilder. You won some trophies and you actually were competitive, which I felt great about as your dad, that you had these things that you wanted to play football, you wanted to wrestle. And I think you would have, especially been a really great wrestler, but I was happy for you that you got to do these other things and to me, that's a form of your resilience.

Josh Nathanson: And I really enjoyed it. I just had a lot of fun doing it.

Michael Nathanson: So what'd you major in, in college?

Josh Nathanson: So I studied philosophy, [00:19:00] government and business. But I focused mostly on philosophy and government.

Michael Nathanson: Who are your favorite philosophers?

Josh Nathanson: So. I had a professor who used to say, and I don't know if I entirely agree with this, but he used to say that Socrates, Plato and Aristotle were sort of like really brilliant kids who just hadn't learned everything that we've learned.

And so it was just fun to see them think through problems that they, that, that, you know, we've solved a lot of these problems with calculus and the scientific method, but they hadn't done that yet. And so to see some of the most brilliant people ever tackle these issues with just none of the tools at their disposal I always thought was really fascinating.

Michael Nathanson: So you're going with the big three?

Josh Nathanson: Yeah. Yeah. And if I had to choose among the three, I would say Aristotle

Michael Nathanson: Aristotle. Okay. Well, that's a, that's a safe pick. So things were going well for you. And you got into University of Chicago and you're going to [00:20:00] law school and then you got some bad news and, so how were you feeling when you learned in December that you needed to have your third open-heart surgery because your valve was failing again?

Josh Nathanson: To be perfectly honest, I had just taken my exams and the first thought that came to my mind was that my valve was failing, while I took the exam. So what am I going to do about that? Which looking back on it, it was not the most important consideration, but after I had thought about that for a little bit, if I'm gonna be perfectly honest, having these two surgeries during my one L year.

It's been kind of, ironically, it's been kind of energizing. I mean, in part, you know, you're worried about death and some thing could happen and that's scary, but at the same time, you know, it's a major challenge and it's kind of energizing to think that I'm going to be able to push through, this challenge and still complete my one L year with my peers.

Michael Nathanson: Just to parrot [00:21:00] your language back to you, you say things like, well, in part I had to deal with the possibility of death, but I mean, do you hear yourself saying these things?

Josh Nathanson: Yeah. Yeah. I know. I mean. I, There I'll tell you that for me, it's been, it's been sort of roller coaster. Yeah. I feel differently every day about it but I think that overall, yeah, I think overall, I think my concerns about failure the actual procedure of failing took a back seat to my sort of energy about the experience.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Well, that's, again, admirable. I'm not sure I would have reacted the same way and I'm not sure most people would have reacted the same way, but that's why you're on this show.

It's not just because you're my son. So, um, tell us about the most recent experience with the aneurysm. You were experiencing symptoms for some time and you had multiple trips to the ER, tell us about how all that went down.

Josh Nathanson: So, I had this [00:22:00] shooting, unexplained pain in the left side of my body.

So I would be doing work. And then all of a sudden I'd have to stop. And I had no idea when the pain would end, but I ultimately went and spoke with my doctors about it. They had no idea what, what was happening. And they're all brilliant people. I have always appreciated their advice and counsel.

They couldn't figure it out. So I ultimately went to the emergency room one night because it was just so painful and I stayed there until five in the morning, I got there at 8pm and stayed there until five in the morning. They ran a ton of tests and they said, sorry, we just, we can't figure it out. So I went home and I kept studying and took my exams. And then the night before my last exam, the night before my Contracts. I don't know if ever if people were listening to receive the paper chase, but it's an infamous law school class Contracts. So the night before [00:23:00] my Contracts exam, while I'm studying the pain was just absolutely unbearable.

I mean, I was yelling in my apartment and I ultimately went, you know, I wasn't going to go to the hospital, but my girlfriend who lives with me said, you're just not going to be able to handle this all night. This is not going to go away. And so she drove me and I waited in the hospital waiting room for a long time, yelling in pain. People were looking at me like I'm absolutely crazy and eventually when I was seen by a doctor, they gave me this really, really strong pain medicine and I felt this temporary, but really nice relief. And they said to me, after they had run straight done some tests and examined everything, they said if you leave the bed right now, you could die. You know, you can't move. And obviously that kind of shocks you [00:24:00] because it had never been that bad for me. I, you know, obviously I had had three surgeries before that, but I'd never had a doctor say to me that you know, like you're that close to death.

And the fact that you've survived this is, it's honestly, it's impressive. And so I called you, I called, my mother and said that, there's going to be emergency surgery tonight. You know, it's, it's now or never essentially. And I was taken in an ambulance to Northwestern Medical Center and they did the surgery. And by the way, when they did the surgery, usually there's some prep time. I mean, it's not, it hadn't been an emergency surgery in the past. So in this case it was emergency surgery. And so it was a very odd feeling, which I hadn't expected just being wheeled into the operating room, totally awake, no meds, or I think put on the operating table and you're about to be opened up and then you just go to sleep.

Michael Nathanson: Wow, you haven't given me those details before.

[00:25:00] **Josh Nathanson:** Yeah. So that's, that's the full story.

Michael Nathanson: That's also the first time you, you told me that they said that if you left the bed, you could die. I mean, I certainly knew how dire it was, but it's pretty hard to hear. So tell us about the aneurism. My understanding is that, they called it a pseudo aneurysm and that it was actually your prior surgeries that ironically saved you.

Josh Nathanson: Right. So, I actually forgot to mention that detail. It's a very important detail, which is that, the scar tissue around my valve had actually prevented my death that actually, the doctor had told me that if I hadn't had that scar tissue, that I probably wouldn't have made it to the emergency room. I couldn't tell you all the specifics, but that's what I was told, which to me was absolutely shocking. But yeah, that's what happened.

Michael Nathanson: But you're here and you're strong. And, I, again, that's why I just think you're the ultimate example of resilience. And to that [00:26:00] point, I've written about you and your experiences a couple of times now, does that make you uncomfortable that I've written about you publicly?

Josh Nathanson: No, not at all. Not at all.

Michael Nathanson: Okay. Because I wrote one article about thoughts and prayers, and basically asked for everyone's thoughts and prayers and made the point that people hear thoughts and prayers and say, that's just the ultimate cliché, and I understand that anger toward that expression. And yet I felt and mom felt as well, a real need for thoughts and prayers. And then, and I wrote that when you were having your third surgery, and then when you were having your fourth surgery, I was, you were recovering and I was because of, it was COVID, only one of us was able to visit you at a time. So I was reflecting on you while mom was visiting with you or maybe it was Anna.

And I, I wrote about one of our shared favorite philosophers Lao Tzu and one of Lao Tzu's famous [00:27:00] sayings or something that's attributed to him, is that the unbending tree is easily broken. And this concept is that when we think about resilience, the whole idea about being strong is not the key to resilience, Lao Tzu says, no, it's not about being strong. It's actually about being bendable about being flexible, about being able to withstand what's going on in the environment and to be able to bounce back. And I was thinking about that. And I actually feel like that's not entirely complete. And you mentioned all the support that you've gotten and at the beginning of our conversation, and it occurred to me that what Lao Tzu didn't refer to was, was the roots.

And that if you have a strong wind and you have a flexible tree, well, that's great. The tree may bend and not break, but it could still get swept up by the wind. It could still be pulled out. And what's important, the roots and the soil [00:28:00] around the roots that hold the roots in place.

And to me, that's the community that surrounds you. Do you agree with that metaphor, do you, do you feel like that's been the case for you?

Josh Nathanson: I do. So the best piece of advice that I was given throughout the process from a mentor of mine was right now it's really easy to appreciate the people around you and everything they're doing for you, but when you recover and you feel like you don't need them anymore, it will be easy to forget. And so, for me, I absolutely think that I would be in a very different place in the recovery process, if it weren't for maybe four or five people. I mean, for me, it's really the close community that I've had. And, I'll never forget that, and I, I think it's important that I don't, but it's also in the broader community too, you know, I've been fortunate to have a lot of people that have followed me throughout my life.

And I think that it's easy when you're in the [00:29:00] hospital, you're in a ton of pain. You're not entirely sure what's going on around you to forget what people have done at the time. But I really try, I tried to hold onto those moments with individuals and I hope to remember them for the rest of my life.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. And we, as a family have done some philanthropic work to try to, promote investment in research that can help you and other people.

And there are many people who suffer from similar conditions and we have, we have our Nathanson family fund for cardiac valve research, which is an endowment Boston Children's hospital, which did the first three surgeries on you. And you have led a Walk Team to raise money and we've done walks for not only for Children's Hospital, where you were treated, but also the American Heart Association, and other organizations. Is that something you think that you'll keep up with over the years?

Josh Nathanson: Definitely. I mean, so I just mentioned remembering [00:30:00] people in the broader community. And I, the way I see it is that I have an outstanding balance to be paid. I have a debt to society and it's been mounting and every surgery amounts to a little bit more. And so I think that I would be, I would really regret it if I didn't in some way, give back to the people who supported me in the past 23 years.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Do you find some purpose in all of this? Has it occurred to you much as my own brain tumor, which I've spoken about publicly has offered me additional purpose in my life.

Do you think that ultimately you might feel that kind of calling and find purpose in helping people avoid having to go through some of the things you've had to go through?

Josh Nathanson: I absolutely believe that part of the debt that will have to, that I, that I'd like to pay back, will include people in similar positions. But for me at this point in my life it's much more [00:31:00] perspective than it is purpose. I realized that I'm not yet sort of in a position where, I can, it can have a concrete purpose and pursue it in the same way that I may be in 10, 15 years. You know, at this point in my life more than anything my challenges have provided I think perspective.

Michael Nathanson: Okay. And now that you're in, hopefully a full recovery mode, I understand that you are, you're already thinking you can't run quite yet, but that you're thinking about training for a half marathon?

Josh Nathanson: That's the plan. Yeah I mentioned earlier that the surgeries really energized me. I just think it's honestly, it's exciting to be able to push through a challenge like this and see how far I can get. So part of that is going to be hopefully a half marathon.

Michael Nathanson: Okay. And is it true that you're also, already at the age of 23, a published author several times over.

Josh Nathanson: Yeah. I mean, I've had a lot of help in that process, but yeah, I love to [00:32:00] write and I definitely will continue to write and, you know, it's a passion of mine.

Michael Nathanson: What's the future for Josh Nathanson? What is, what does the future look like? What are your ambitions? How do you envision your future?

Josh Nathanson: For me, so I mentioned earlier that I didn't really play a lot of team sports as a kid. I spent a lot of time reading and thinking and I've just really developed a passion for the details of life. Like I just, I really enjoy the concept of mastery and I haven't reached, I don't think I've reached mastery in any part of my life or even close. But what really sort of gets me excited about the future is the idea that I could find some part of it, some corner of the world and, you know, try to develop mastery to achieve mastery. And so I know right now, just from the past couple of years, that's going to be in law. I'm not entirely sure what part of law, but I am drawn to the parts of law now that are ultra like technical [00:33:00] and complicated and I'd like to eventually be an expert.

Michael Nathanson: You know, sometimes the things that are most obvious to us are the things that we ignore take for granted. And sometimes you don't even see them, even though they're right in front of our face, because they're so obvious. Has it ever occurred to you that you already have developed mastery in particular, in this concept of resilience?

Josh Nathanson: That's an interesting concept. I'd never even thought of that before. I mean, I would say no, I don't think that I've developed mastery. So this is my martial arts background kicking into this point, but I've always believed that the highest level, right in order to really truly achieve mastery is to be able to teach and to be able to bring somebody to your level and I don't really truly understand adversity yet, I think that if somebody came to me and said, you know, I have a very similar situation, I'm not really sure what my next steps are. I think I'd have some considerations. I think I'd [00:34:00] had, I can talk about my own experience, but I don't really truly understand adversity and the best way to navigate it and how it fits into the rest of your life. I mean, I think that's going to take many decades to really understand.

Michael Nathanson: Okay, well, that's quite a statement from someone who's been through four open-heart surgeries by the age of 23 and who is still thriving as well as you are and has such a positive attitude the way you do. So if you had to give one piece of advice for people who have had to endure substantial, really difficult medical challenges like you, what kind of advice could you offer?

Josh Nathanson: Well, I would pass on the advice, the best advice that I got during the process, which again, is that it's easy to forget the people around you and everything that they've done for you, when you've recovered but those people, they gave a part of themselves to you and you should remember that. That's the advice that I would give.

Michael Nathanson: Okay. [00:35:00] Well, I appreciate that. So Josh as part of what we do for Seeking the Extraordinary we go through two segments, one is a key learning segment, and then the other is a teaching moment segment. And I know that you're only 23, but your mom and I have always said, you have wisdom well beyond your years. So hopefully our audience can learn something from you and from your perspective. So my first question under our key learning segment is what have been your biggest mistakes or learning opportunities in your life?

Josh Nathanson: So, my biggest mistake I would say is that, and I'm still struggling with it. Now I would say is that I, I think work is good. It's good. Definitely to work as hard as you can but there are a lot of sacrifices and it's easy to forget about those sacrifices. And I didn't really even understand that I was making sacrifices until the past couple of years, and what I mean by that, just to be a little bit more concrete is that, [00:36:00] you know, it feels good to be doing work from six in the morning until whatever it is midnight, but you lose a lot of life.

And, I haven't achieved balance at all in my life to be perfectly honest. It's something that I've regretted just in the past 23 years. Even though I'm still at the beginning of my life and especially now that I have a long-term relationship with a significant other and you know, I have other considerations in my life.

It's not just all about my future. I've just begun to begin to be and to realize that. You know, I had to make any sacrifices in the past and that if you continue to do this one day, I think I could look back on my life and think, you know, I worked a lot, but you know, what did I, what do I really remember? What are the moments that stick out to me? Cause the moments that stick out to you are not going to be, you know, 1 in the morning in a library, that's not going to be the moment that sticks out to you in your past. I don't think at least [00:37:00]

Michael Nathanson: Great answer and a great perspective. What are you most proud of?

Josh Nathanson: I think that I'm most proud. I think I'm most proud of the past few months, honestly only because I just think it's so fun to have doctors say to you. How did you keep doing your assignments? How did you take all these exams when you were, when your valve was failing?

And. Yeah, in part, obviously there is some fear there, but you do feel a little bit of a pride and you know, it's been fun to.

I mean, it's kind of a weird word to use, but it's been fun to have, the aneurysm and the valve replacement and still being able to push through onto the next step in my life and have people around me say, you know, maybe you should stop.

Maybe you should take a year off. Maybe you should stop taking your classes. You should take them all pass, fail, whatever I mean, it's not a very humble thing to say, but to be perfectly honest. So that's what I'm most proud of.

Michael Nathanson: Sure. I mean, I heard those same things and it must be gratifying to hear that. [00:38:00] I have to say that I object to your use of the term fun because it was an absolute nightmare for your mother and I. And, but I do love your perspective. I have come to believe that extraordinary people are people that understand who their mentors are and value their mentors and utilize their relationships with their mentors to become better. Do you have key mentors?

Josh Nathanson: Absolutely. And if I were to talk about all of my mentors, who would take too much time to take the entire segment to talk about my mentors, but I would say so some of the most notables, so one is Tom, you know, I have been studying martial arts my entire life. I

was seven years old and unlike, I think a lot of other activities in life, martial arts can be all consuming. So, you know, it became my job. It became a place where I asked for life advice. It became a place where I grew up and found out who I was going to be, where I [00:39:00] took on some of my first challenges.

I mean, we haven't talked about this yet. I don't think, but you know, before the first surgery, the night before the first surgery I tested for my black belt. So, I mean, that was a major part of life.

Michael Nathanson: I remember.

Josh Nathanson: Yeah and so I think that at this point it's really unique, I think to have a mentor who seen you since you were seven years old. So I would definitely be Tom on the list. Some other mentors that have had, especially as, you know, as a lawyer, I have a lot of lawyers in my family. So you and my grandfather, really counseled me throughout the past few years and then, I mean, there are also some professional mentors. I've really been fortunate to have opportunities here in Chicago and also in Boston where I've met people who are still in contact with, still email. One is, Jeremy Haber at Fidelity, another one is Nicole Warden and people that I've just sort of, mentored me throughout the years and I still try to keep in touch with, but yeah, again, I've been really fortunate because I've had a ton of people who've mentored me.

Michael Nathanson: You're [00:40:00] a little bit young for me to be asking this next question but you're only 23, but what do you hope one day is your legacy?

Josh Nathanson: That is a hard question to answer.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. For a 23-year-old.

Josh Nathanson: Yeah. Uh, my legacy, I mean, so a couple of things, I talked about balance earlier, so a lot of, so I think when I was 18 years old, what I would have told you, my legacy is going to be my legacy is that I'd like to accumulate accolades. And I'd like to be somebody who is an expert in some field and who maybe breaks new ground and is influential and perhaps, maybe even studied you know, later. But I think that an important part of my legacy will actually be the connections that I have with other people and so I'm a little bit less focused now, I think on what I would call it a paper legacy, and trying to be a little bit more focused on social legacy.

Michael Nathanson: That's again, your mom and I [00:41:00] have always said you're wise beyond your years. I liked that a lot. I like that concept about differentiating a paper legacy toward a social or personal legacy. So a teaching moment I'm going to ask you some rapid fire questions.

You may or may not have rapid answers for them, but the first problem is, what single habit technique or tip would you offer that has helped you be your most extraordinary self?

Josh Nathanson: So, you know, you mentioned Lao Tzu, we've talked about him a little bit and it's a little bit of a cliché, but most famous quote is, you know, journey of a thousand miles starts with the first step. I would say that, especially you're talking about the surgeries that for me, getting to my ultimate destination has been about like, actually I remember this great moment where I was in the hospital, most recently.

And this might be a little bit more information and then people are going to want to hear. But when you first wake up from surgery, you're constipated, you can't go to the [00:42:00] bathroom. It takes a long time to not be constipated, uh, it happened all four times. And if I have surgery again, which I will, it's going to happen again.

So anyways I remember that I was scrolling through social media and I saw one of my classmates was nationally recognized for, is it like a moot court competition.

I was thinking to myself, I just took a poop for the first time today. And I'm like really proud of that really proud, you know, this guy is killing it.

I mean he's doing really well. And I actually feel bad at first. It felt really bad at first I felt kind of like, you know, I feel kind of embarrassed and I was so excited about not being constipated anymore, but I don't know how, but I think that the lesson though, is that again journey of a thousand miles because of the first step, first step for me was to be able to unclog myself so.

Michael Nathanson: That's great. And we do say that all the time, the journey of a thousand miles begins with the first step, and it's a very health way of looking at life. What's the, so actually, so my next question, maybe that answers the next [00:43:00] question, but my next question is usually what's the best advice you've ever given to or received from someone else?

Josh Nathanson: That is a good question. The best advice that I've ever been given, I'm not going to say the best advice I've ever given anybody. I don't think, I think that would be a little presumptuous, but, I'm not actually sure. Maybe we can return to that question in minute. I'd like to get you a good answer because I've had some good advice throughout the years, that I've been given.

Michael Nathanson: Do you believe you have a personal mission? This is a concept that we've talked about mission statements and this concept of whether our family has a mission. People think about companies having missions. I think about myself and my mission, and my mission is to live my most meaningful and joyful life by helping others live their most meaningful and joyful life. Do you have a personal mission?

Josh Nathanson: Well, I am in a really unique position because I think law is a place where young [00:44:00] people can do a lot. So one example is, I mean, a lot of people after they graduate from law school, they become clerks. And as a clerk, I mean, you, some clerks actually will write portions of opinions for judges and clerks will do extensive research, and naturally influence, you know, where the law is.

And so at this point in my life, I would say my personal mission is to have some sort of lasting impact. I mean, it's part of the mastery goal for me, right. Is that, I mean, to really have a meaningful impact on something and, you know, it definitely helps to be a master but I think that the ultimate goal is to move some field or profession for a little way, hopefully.

Michael Nathanson: Well, maybe I can just pick up on that a little bit and just say that you and I have talked about the meaning of life, and I've told you that I believe that the meaning of life is that we're all here to be part of something that transcends us something that we'll never see, that we're all part [00:45:00] of a great evolution that every one of us has a role to play as microscopic, as, as that may be in an evolution that millions of years from now, when humans don't even look like they currently look like, we're all part of something bigger and probably better than what we are right now. And people often say, well, you know, if someone dies at a young age or someone is a bad person, what's their meaning? And again, I think all of that plays in and it's how we have an impact on each other. It's all part of the evolution. Does that make any sense to you and in terms of your role in the universe?

Josh Nathanson: Yeah, I think so. I think that, you know, so if you were to look at like human society to get a little abstract, 500 years ago, the sort of accumulated wisdom, at least technologically scientifically, hadn't [00:46:00] gotten this nearly as far as we are today. And so if you compare society now to then, I mean, it's unthinkable to living that that long ago right in that sort of world, but the world we live in right now is a product of sort of the aggregate decisions that were made in the hundreds of years. Right. And so there's really, it's really difficult to point to one person and say, You know, this is the person that made it such that I could live a life like I live today. Even people like Aristotle, they don't have that kind of impact. Right. Einstein didn't have that kind of impact. Nobody, nobody can have that kind of impact.

But what ultimately happens when moves us forward, I think is the accumulation of little changes made by individuals. So absolutely I think it ties into to what I, what I said was my personal issue.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah, and I'd like to think that everything you've had to endure that no one should have to endure, especially not someone your age, that all may be part of that [00:47:00] larger evolution and that you are playing your role and Josh, just for the record and I'll give you a chance to respond. But just for the record, I do believe you are a master of resilience. I do believe that you are the bending flexible tree that you do have strong roots, that you do understand and appreciate the community around you. And that you have demonstrated through all that you've had to endure what resilience really looks like.

You mentioned the idea of having to have another surgery that breaks my heart to hear you say that, because it's not entirely clear, you will have to have another surgery it's theoretically possible that you won't. And I'd like to hear a little bit more about that if you don't mind, but boy, my hope is that you won't, and Josh, I'll just say that as your father and not as your podcast host, but as your father, I'm just very proud of your bravery and your example and your [00:48:00] resilience and I love you for all of those things.

Josh Nathanson: Thank you. I really appreciate this. This has been a great conversation. I've had a lot of fun. Yeah, thanks, thanks a lot.

Michael Nathanson: But I have to ask though, you really think you're gonna have to have another surgery?

Josh Nathanson: Yeah. I mean, look like I've had four surgeries now, all four times I've been told this is going to be your situation for the next 40 years or for the rest of your life and you know, fool me once, but more seriously I think that it's in the nature of doctors and surgeons, to focus on broad trends, statistical trends, but you know, I'm an individual and things happen, a little skin bacteria can get into your body and it can kill you. And so, you know, it's difficult to predict, but at this point in my life, I do expect probably to have, I hope to live a long life so I think at some point the next 80, sorry, the next 60 years, it's very likely that I'll have [00:49:00] another surgery.

Michael Nathanson: Yeah. Well, we're going to keep working hard to make sure that all of the best research is performed to make sure that you have the best outcome. You have a mechanical valve now, which has a, a good track record. Although you can hear it as it, as it clicks to remind you that it's there. Your ascending aorta has been partially replaced by hopefully to indestructible Dacron tube graft. So you're in some respects, the bionic man now, and I'm looking forward to seeing you do fantastic things in the future. Any parting words, Josh?

Josh Nathanson: I thought of the best advice that I've been given. Okay. The best advice that I've been given and it's from Led Zeppelin. The best advice is yes, there are two paths you can go on, but in the long run...

Michael Nathanson: There still time to change the road you're on.

Josh Nathanson: Exactly.

Michael Nathanson: I love it.

Josh Nathanson: Yeah, exactly and by the way, actually, growing up, you told me that many times. Yeah. That was always your, your advice. And I actually think it's really good advice. I had a, very quickly, I had, a friend growing up. [00:50:00] I won't embarrass him by mentioning him, but he, you know, he was going through some difficulties at the time. And like, that was really meaningful advice for him. You know, he was a huge Zeppelin fan. It was very meaningful advice for him. And it has been for me too.

Michael Nathanson: It's the greatest song ever written. And to me, that's not, not in dispute. Josh, you are truly extraordinary. And ladies and gentlemen, that is the extraordinary Joshua Nathanson. And thank you to our sponsor, The Colony Group. The Colony Group is a national wealth and business management company with 15 offices across the country. That itself seeks the extraordinary as it pursues its unrelenting mission of providing clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow to learn more about The Colony Group and how it manages beyond money visit www.thecolonygroup.com.

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