

**Lex Fridman Podcast #436 - Ivanka Trump: Politics, Family, Real Estate, Fashion,
Music, and Life**

Published - July 2, 2024

Transcribed by - thepodtranscripts.com

Lex Fridman

The following is a conversation with Ivanka Trump, businesswoman, real estate developer, and former senior advisor to the president of the United States. I've gotten to know Ivanka well over the past two years. We've become good friends, hitting it off right away over our mutual love of reading, especially philosophical writings from Marcus Aurelius, Joseph Campbell, Alan Watts, Viktor Frankl, and so on. She is a truly kind, compassionate, and thoughtful human being. In the past, people have attacked her, in my view, to get indirectly at her dad, Donald Trump, as part of a dirty game of politics and clickbait journalism. These attacks obscured many projects and efforts, often bipartisan, that she helped get done, and they obscured the truth of who she is as a human being. Through all that, she never returned the attacks with anything but kindness and always walked through the fire of it all with grace. For this, and much more, she is an inspiration and I'm honored to be able to call her a friend. Oh, and for those living in the United States, happy upcoming 4th of July. It's both an anniversary of this country's Declaration of Independence and an anniversary of my immigrating here to the U.S. I'm forever grateful for this amazing country, for this amazing life, for all of you who have given a chance to a silly kid like me. From the bottom of my heart, thank you. I love you all. This is the Lex Fridman Podcast. To support it, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Ivanka Trump. You said that ever since you were young, you wanted to be a builder, that you loved the idea of designing beautiful city skylines, especially in New York City. I love the New York City skyline. So, describe the origins of that love of building.

Ivanka Trump

I think there's both an incredible confidence and a total insecurity that comes with youth. So, I remember at 15, I would look out over the city skyline from my bedroom window in New York and imagine where I could contribute and add value, in a way that I look back on and completely laugh at how confident I was. But I've known since some of my earliest memories, it's something I've wanted to do. And I think fundamentally, I love art. I love expressions of beauty in so many different forms. With architecture, there's the tangible, and I think that marriage of function and something that exists beyond yourself is very compelling. I also grew up in a family where my mother was in the real estate business, working alongside my father. My father was in the business. And I saw the joy that it brought to them. So, I think I had these natural positive associations. They used to send me as a little girl, renderings of projects they were about to embark on with notes, asking if I would hurry up and finish school so I could come join them. So, I had these positive associations, but it came from something within myself. I think that as I got older and as I got involved in real estate, I realized that it was so multidisciplinary. You have, of course, the design, but you also have engineering, the brass tacks of construction. There's time management, there's project planning. Just the duration of time to complete one of these iconic structures, it's enormous. You can contribute a decade of your life to one project. So, while you have to think big picture, it means you really have to care deeply about the details because you live with them. So, it allowed me to flex a lot of areas of interest.

Lex Fridman

I love that confidence of youth.

Ivanka Trump

It's funny because we're all so insecure, right? In the most basic interactions, but yet, our ambitions are so unbridled in a way that kind of makes you blush as an adult. And I think it's fun. It's fun to tap into that energy.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, where everything is possible. I think some of the greatest builders I've ever met, kind of always have that little flame of everything is possible, still burning. That is a silly notion from youth, but it's not so silly. Everybody tells you something is impossible, but if you continue believing that it's possible and to have that sort of naive notion that you could do it, even if it's exceptionally difficult, that naive notion turns into some of the greatest projects ever done.

Ivanka Trump

A 100%.

Lex Fridman

Going out to space or building a new company where like everybody said, it's impossible, taking on that gigantic company and disrupting them and revolutionizing how stuff is done, or doing huge building projects where, like you said, so many people are involved in making that happen.

Ivanka Trump

We get conditioned out of that feeling.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Ivanka Trump

We start to become insecure, and we start to rely on the input or validation of others, and it takes us away from that core drive and ambition. So, it's fun to reflect on that and also to smile, right? Because whether you can execute or not, time will tell. But yeah, no, that was very much my childhood.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, of course, it's important to also have the humility of once you get humbled and realize that it's actually a lot of work to build.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

I still am amazed just looking at big buildings, big bridges, that human beings are able to get together and build those things. That's one of my favorite things about architecture is just like, wow. It's a manifestation of the fact that humans can collaborate and do something epic, much bigger than themselves, and it's like a statue that represents that and it can be there for a long time.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. I think, in some ways, you look out at different city skylines and it's almost like a visual depiction of ambition realized, right?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Ivanka Trump

It's a testament to somebody's dream. Not somebody, a whole ensemble of people's dreams and visions and triumphs, and in some cases, failures, if the projects weren't properly executed. So, you look at these skylines, and it's a testament to that. I actually heard once architecture described as frozen music. That really resonated with me.

Lex Fridman

I love thinking about a city skyline as an ensemble of dreams realized.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. I remember the first time I went to Dubai and I was watching them dredging out and creating these man-made islands. And I remember somebody once saying to me, they're an architect, an architect actually who collaborated with us on our tower in Chicago. He said that the only thing that limited what an architect could do in that area was gravity and imagination.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, but gravity is a tricky one to work against, and that's where civil engineer is one of my favorite things. I used to build bridges in high school for physics classes. You have to build bridges and you compete on how much weight they can carry relative to their own weight. You study how good it is by finding its breaking point. And that was a deep appreciation for me, on a miniature scale of on a large scale, what people are able to do with civil engineering because gravity is a tricky one to fight against.

Ivanka Trump

It definitely is. And bridges, I mean, some of the iconic designs in our country are incredible bridges.

Lex Fridman

So, if we think of skylines as ensembles of dreams realized, you spent quite a bit of time in New York. What do you love about and what do you think about the New York City skyline? What's a good picture? We're looking here at a few. I mean, looking over the water.

Ivanka Trump

Well, I think the water's an unbelievable feature of the New York skyline as you see the island on approach. And oftentimes, you'll see, like in these images, you'll see these towers reflecting off of the water's surface. So, I think there's something very beautiful and unique about that. When I look at New York, I see this unbelievable sort of tapestry of different types of architecture. So, you have the Gothic form as represented by buildings like the Woolworth Building. Or, you'll have Art Deco as represented by buildings like 40 Wall Street or the Chrysler Building or Rockefeller Center. And then, you'll have these unbelievable super modern examples, or modernist examples like Lever House and Seagram's House. So, you have all of these different styles, and I think to build in New York, you're really building the best of the best. So, nobody's giving New York their second-rate work. And especially when a lot of those buildings were built, there was this incredible competition happening between New York and Chicago for kind of dominance of the sky and for who could create the greatest skyline, that sort of race to the sky when skyscrapers were first being built, starting in Chicago and then, New York surpassing that in terms of height, at least, with the Empire State Building. So, I love contextualizing the skylines as well, and thinking back to when different components that are so iconic were added and the context in which they came into being.

Lex Fridman

I got to ask you about this. There's a pretty cool page that I've been following on X, Architecture & Tradition, and they celebrate traditional schools of architecture. And you mentioned Gothic, the tapestry. This is in Chicago, the Tribune Tower in Chicago. So, what do you think about that, the old and the new mixed together? Do you like Gothic?

Ivanka Trump

I think it's hard to look at something like the Tribune Tower and not be completely in awe. This is an unbelievable building. Look at those buttresses and you've got gargoyles hanging off of it. And this style was reminiscent of the cathedrals of Europe, which was very in vogue in the 1920s here in America. Actually, I mentioned the Woolworth Tower before. The Woolworth Tower was actually referred to as the Cathedral of Commerce, because it also was in that Gothic style.

Lex Fridman

Amazing.

Ivanka Trump

So, this was built maybe a decade before the Tribune building, but the Tribune building to me is, it's almost not replicable. It personally really resonates with me because one of the first projects I ever worked on was building Trump Chicago, which was this beautiful, elegant, super modern, all glass skyscraper, right across the way. So, it was right across the river. So, I would look out the windows as it was under construction, or be standing quite literally on rebar of the building, looking out at the Tribune and incredibly inspired. And now, the reflective glass of the building reflects back not only the river, but also the Tribune building and other buildings on Michigan Avenue.

Lex Fridman

Do you like it when the reflective properties of the glass is part of the architecture?

Ivanka Trump

I think it depends. They have super-reflective glass that sometimes doesn't work. It's distracting. And I think it's one component of sort of a composition that comes together. I think in this case, the glass on Trump Chicago is very beautiful. It was designed by Adrian Smith of Skidmore, Owings & Merrill, a major architecture firm who actually did the Burj Khalifa in Dubai, which is, I think, an awe-inspiring example of modern architecture. But glass is tricky. You have to get the shade right. Some glass has a lot of iron in it and gets super green, and that's a choice. And sometimes you have more blue properties, blue-silver, like you see here, but it's part of the character.

Lex Fridman

How do you know what it's actually going to look like when it's done? Is it possible to imagine that? Because it feels like there's so many variables.

Ivanka Trump

I think so. I think if you have a vivid imagination, and if you sit with it, and then if you also go beyond the rendering, right? You have to live with the materials. So, you don't build a 92-story building glass curtain wall and not deeply examine the actual curtain wall before purchasing it. So, you have to spend a lot of time with the actual materials, not just the beautiful artistic renderings, which can be incredibly misleading. The goal is actually that the end result is much, much more compelling than what the architect or artist rendered. But oftentimes, that's very much not the case. Sometimes also, you mentioned context, sometimes I'll see renderings of buildings, I'm like, wait, what about the building right to the left of it that's blocking 80% of its views of the ... Architects, they'll remove things that are inconvenient. So, you have to be rooted in -

Lex Fridman

In reality.

Ivanka Trump

In reality. Exactly.

Lex Fridman

And I love the notion of living with the materials in contrast to living in the imagined world of the drawings.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

So, both are probably important, because you have to dream the thing into existence, but you also have to be rooted in what the thing is actually going to look like in the context of everything else.

Ivanka Trump

A 100%.

Lex Fridman

One of the underlying principles of the page I just mentioned, and I hear folks mention this a lot, is that modern architecture is kind of boring, that it lacks soul and beauty. And you just spoke with admiration for both modern and for Gothic, for older architecture. So, do you think there's truth that modern architecture is boring?

Ivanka Trump

I'm living in Miami currently, so I see a lot of super uninspired glass boxes on the waterfront, but I think exceptional things shouldn't be the norm. They're typically rare. And I think in modern architecture, you find an abundance of amazing examples of super compelling and innovative building designs. I mean, I mentioned the Burj Khalifa. It is awe-inspiring. This is an unbelievably striking example of modern architecture. You look at some older examples, the Sydney Opera House. And so, I think there's unbelievable ... There you go. I mean, that's like a needle in the sky.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Reaching out to the stars.

Ivanka Trump

It's huge. And in the context of a city where there's a lot of height. So, it's unbelievable. But I think one of the things that's probably exciting me the most about architecture right now is

the innovation that's happening within it. There's example of robotic fabrication, there's 3D printing. Your friend and who you introduced me to not too long ago, Neri Oxman, which he's doing at the intersection of biology and technology and thinking about how to create more sustainable development practices, quite literally trying to create materials that will biodegrade back into the earth. I think there's something really cool happening now with the rediscovery of ancient building techniques. So, you have self-healing concrete that was used by the Romans. An art and a practice of using volcanic ash and lime that's now being rediscovered and is more critical than ever as we think about how much of our infrastructure relies on concrete and how much of that is failing on the most basic level. So, I think actually, it's a really, really exciting time for innovation in architecture. And I think there are some incredible examples of modern design that are really exciting. But generally, I think Roosevelt said that, "Comparison is the thief of joy." So, it's hard. You look at the Tribune Building, you look at some of these iconic structures. One of the buildings I'm most proud to have worked on was the historical Old Post Office building in Washington D.C. You look at a building like that and it feels like it has no equal.

Lex Fridman

Also, there's a psychological element where people tend to want to complain about the new and celebrate the old.

Ivanka Trump

Always. It's like the history of time.

Lex Fridman

There's just, people are always skeptical and concerned about change. And it's true that there's a lot of stuff that's new that's not good, it's not going to last, it's not going to stand the test of time, but some things will. And just like in modern art and modern music, there's going to be artists that stand the test of time and we'll later look back and celebrate them, "Those were the good times."

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

When you just step back, what do you love about architecture? Is it the beauty? Is it the function?

Ivanka Trump

I'm most emotionally drawn, obviously, to the beauty, but I think as somebody who's built things, I really believe that the form has to follow the function. There's nothing uglier than a space that is ill-conceived, that otherwise, it's decoration. And I think that after that initial reaction to seeing something that's aesthetically really pleasing to me, when I look at a

building or a project, I love thinking about how it's being used. So, having been able to build so many things in my career and worked on so many incredible projects, I mean, it's really, really rewarding after the fact, to have somebody come up to you and tell you that they got engaged in the lobby of your building or they got married in the ballroom, and share with you some of those experiences. So, to me, that's equally as beautiful, the use cases for these unbelievable projects. But I think it's all of it. I love that you've got the construction and you've got the design, and you've got then the interior design, and you've got the financing elements, the marketing elements, and it's all wrapped up in this one effort. So, to me, it's exciting to sort of flex in all of those different ways.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Like you said, it's dreams realized, hard work realized. I mean, probably on the bridge side is why I love the function. In terms of function being primary, you just think of the millions-

Ivanka Trump

Oh my gosh, look at that.

Lex Fridman

... bridges-

Ivanka Trump

Go down. Look at that.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. This is Devil's Bridge in Germany.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. I wouldn't say it's the most practical design, but look how beautiful that is.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. So, this is probably ... Well, we don't know. We need to interview some people whether the function holds up, but in terms of beauty, and then, what we're talking about, using the water for the reflection and the shape that it creates, I mean, there's an elegance to the shape of a bridge.

Ivanka Trump

See, it's interesting that they call it Devil's Bridge because to me, this is very ethereal. I think about the ring, the circle, life.

Lex Fridman

There's nothing about this that makes me feel ... Maybe they're just being ironic in the names.

Ivanka Trump

Unless that function's really flawed.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, exactly. Maybe-

Ivanka Trump

Nobody's ever successfully crossed it.

Lex Fridman

Could cross the bridge. Yeah. But I mean, to me, there's just iconic ... I love looking at bridges because of the function. It's the Brooklyn Bridge or the Golden Gate Bridge. I mean, those are probably my favorites in the United States. Just in a city, to be able to look out and see the skyline combined with the suspension bridge, and thinking of all the millions of cars that pass, the busyness, us humans getting together and going to work, building cool stuff. And just the bridge kind of represents the turmoil and the busyness of a city as it creates. It's cool.

Ivanka Trump

And the connectivity as well.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. The network of roads all come together. So, there, the bridge is the ultimate combination of function and beauty.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. I remember when I was first learning about bridges, studying the cable stay versus the suspension bridge. And I mean, you actually built many replicas, so I'm sure you'll have a point of view on this, but they really are so beautiful. And you mentioned the Brooklyn Bridge, but growing up in New York, that was as much a part of the architectural story and tapestry of that skyline as any building that's seen in it.

Lex Fridman

What in general is your philosophy of design and building in architecture?

Ivanka Trump

Well, some of the most recent projects I worked on prior to government service were the Old Post Office building and almost simultaneously, Trump Doral in Miami. So, these were

both two just massive undertakings, both redevelopments, which in a lot of cases, having worked on ground-up construction redevelopment projects, are in a lot of ways much more complicated because you have existing attributes, but also a lot of limitations you have to work within, especially when you're repurposing a use. So, the Old Post Office building on Pennsylvania Avenue was-

Lex Fridman

It's so beautiful.

Ivanka Trump

It's unbelievable. So, this was a Romanesque revival building built in the 1890s on America's Main Street to symbolize American grandeur. And at the time, there were post office being built in this style across the country, but this being really the defining one. Still to this day, the tallest habitable structure in Washington. The tallest structure being the monument. The nation's only vertical park, which is that clock tower. But you've got these thick granite walls, those carved granite turrets, just an unbelievable building. You've got this massive atrium that runs through the whole center of it that is topped with glass. So, having the opportunity to spearhead a project like that was so exciting. And actually, it was my first renovation project, so I came to it with a tremendous amount of energy, vigor and humility about how to do it properly. Ensuring I had all the right people. We had countless federal and local government agencies that would oversee every single decision we made. But in advance of even having the opportunity to do it, there was a close to two-year request for proposal, like a process that was put out by the General Services Administration. So, it was this really arduous government procurement process that we were competing against so many different people for the opportunity, which a lot of people said it was a gigantic waste of time. But I looked at that and I think so did a lot of the other bidders and say, "It's worth trying to put the best vision forward."

Lex Fridman

So, you fell in love with this project? This-

Ivanka Trump

I fell in love. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

So, is there some interesting details about what it takes to do renovation, about some of the challenges or opportunities? Because you want to maintain the beauty of the old and now upgrade the functionality, I guess, and maybe modernize some aspects of it without destroying what made the building magical in the first place.

Ivanka Trump

So, I think the greatest asset was already there, the exterior of the building, which we meticulously restored, and any addition to it had to be done very gently in terms of any signage additions. The interior spaces were completely dilapidated. It had been a post office, then was used for a really rundown food court and government office spaces. It was actually losing \$6 million a year when we got the concession to build it and when we won. And became one of, I think, a great example of public-private partnerships working together. But I think the biggest challenge in having such a radical use conversion is just how you lay it out. So, the amount of time ... I would get on that Acela twice a week, three times a week, to spend day trips down in Washington. And we would walk every single inch of the building, laying out the floor plans, debating over the configuration of a room. There were almost 300 rooms, and there were almost 300 layouts. So, nothing could be repeated. Whereas, when you're building from scratch, you have a box and you decide where you want to add potential elements, and you kind of can stack the floor plan all the way up. But when you're working within a building like this, every single room was different. You see the setbacks. So, the setback then required you to move the plumbing. So, it was really a labor of love. And to do something like this ... And that's why I think renovation ... We had it with Doral as well. It was 700 rooms, over 650 acres of property. And so, every single unit was very different and complicated. Not as complicated, in some ways, the scale of it was so massive, but not as complicated as the Old Post Office. But it required a level of precision. And I think in real estate, you have a lot of people who design on plan and a lot of people who are in the business of acquiring and flipping. So, it's more financial engineering than it is building. And they don't spend the time sweating these details that make something great and make something functional. And you feel it in the end result. But I mean, blood, sweat, tears, years of my life for those projects, and it was worth it. I enjoyed, almost, I enjoyed almost every minute of it.

Lex Fridman

So, to you, it's not about the flipping, to you, it's about the art and the function of the thing that you're creating?

Ivanka Trump

A 100%.

Lex Fridman

What's design on plan? I'm learning new things today.

Ivanka Trump

When proposals are put forth by an architect and really just the plan is accepted without ... And in the case of a renovation, if you're not walking those rooms ... The number of times a beautifully laid out room was on a blueprint and then, I'd go to Washington and I'd walk that floor and I'd realize that there was a column that ran right up through the middle of the

space where the bed was supposed to be, or the toilet was supposed to be, or the shower. So, there's a lot of things that are missed when you do something conceptually without rooting it in the actual structure. And that's why I think even with ground-up construction as well, people who aren't constantly on their job sites, constantly walking the projects, there's a lot that's missed.

Lex Fridman

I mean, there's a wisdom to the idea that we talked about before, live with the materials and walking the construction site, walking the rooms. I mean, that's what you hear from people like Steve Jobs, like Elon. That's why you live on the factory floor. That's why you constantly obsess about the details of the actual, not of the plans, but the physical reality of the product. I mean, the insanity of Steve Jobs and Jony Ive working together on making it perfect, making the iPhone, the early designs, prototypes, making that perfect, what it actually feels like in the hand. You have to be there as close to the metal as possible to truly understand.

Ivanka Trump

And you have to love it in order to do that.

Lex Fridman

Right. It shouldn't be about how much it's going to sell for and all that kind of stuff. You have to love the art.

Ivanka Trump

Because for the most part, you can probably get 90, maybe even 95% of the end result, unless something has terribly gone awry, by not caring with that level of almost like maniacal precision. But you'll notice that 10% for the rest of your life. So, I think that extra effort, that passion, I think that's what separates good from great.

Lex Fridman

If we go back to that young Ivanka, the confidence of youth, and if we could talk about your mom. She had a big influence on you. You told me she was an adventurer.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Olympic skier and a businesswoman. What did you learn about life from your mother?

Ivanka Trump

So much. She passed away two years ago now. And she was a remarkable, remarkable woman. She was a trailblazer in so many different ways, as an athlete and growing up in

communist Czechoslovakia, as a fashion mogul, as a real estate executive and builder. Just this all-around trailblazing businesswoman. I also learned from her, aside from that element, how to really enjoy life. I look back and some of my happiest memories of her are in the ocean- ... memories of her are in the ocean, just lying on our back, looking up at the sun and just so in the moment or dancing. She loved to dance, so she really taught me a lot about living life to its fullest. And she had so much courage, so much conviction, so much energy, and a complete comfort with who she was.

Lex Fridman

What do you think about that? Olympic athlete. The trade-off between ambition and just wanting to do big things and pursuing that and giving your all to that, and being able to relax and just throw your arms back and enjoy every moment of life. That trade-off. What do you think about that trade-off?

Ivanka Trump

I think because she was this unbelievable, formidable athlete and because of the discipline she had as a child, I think it made her value those moments more as an adult. I think she was a great balance of the two that we all hope to find, and she was able to find both incredibly serious and formidable. I remember as a little girl, I used to literally traipse behind her at the Plaza Hotel, which she oversaw and actually was her old post office. It was this unbelievable historic hotel in New York City, and I'd follow her around at construction meetings and on job sites. And there she is, dancing. See? That's funny that that's the picture you pull up.

Lex Fridman

I'm sorry. The two of you just look great in that picture.

Ivanka Trump

That's great. She had such a joy to her and she was so unabashed in her perspective and her opinions. She made my father look reserved, so whatever she was feeling, she was just very expressive and a lot of fun to be around.

Lex Fridman

So she, as you mentioned, grew up during the Prague Spring in 1968, and that had a big impact on human history. My family came from the Soviet Union. And then the story of the 20th century is a lot of Eastern Europe, the Soviet Union, tried the ideas of communism, and it turned out that a lot of those ideas resulted into a lot of suffering. So why do you think the communist ideology failed?

Ivanka Trump

I think fundamentally as people, we desire freedom. We want agency. And my mom was like a lot of other people who grew up in similar situations where she didn't like to talk about it that often, so one of my real regrets is that I didn't push her harder. But I think back to the

conversations we did have, and I try to imagine what it's like. She was at Charles University in Prague, which was really a focal point of the reforms that were ushered in during the Prague Spring and the liberalization agenda that was happening. The dance halls were opening, the student activists, and she was attending university there right at that same time. So the contrast to this feeling of freedom and progress and liberalization in the spring, and then it so quickly being crushed in the fall of that same year when the Warsaw Pact countries and the Soviet Union rolled in to put down and ultimately roll back all those reforms. So for her to have lived through that, she didn't come to North America until she was 23 or 24, so that was her life. As a young girl, she was on the junior national Ski team for Czechoslovakia. My grandfather used to train her. They used to put the skis on her back and walk up the mountain in Czechoslovakia because there were no ski lifts. She actually made me do that when I was a child just to let me know what her experience had been. If I complained that it was cold out, she's like, "Well, you didn't have to walk up the mountain. You'd be plenty warm if you had carried the skis up on your back, up the last run."

Lex Fridman

I feel like they made people tougher back then, like my grandma. And you mentioned, it's funny, they go through some of the darkest things that a human being can go through and they don't talk about it, and they have a general positive outlook on life that's deeply rooted in the knowledge of what life could be. How bad it could get. My grandma survived Holodomor in Ukraine, which was a mass starvation brought on by the collectivist policies of the Stalin regime, and then she survived the Nazi occupation of Ukraine. Never talked about it. Probably went through extremely dark, extremely difficult times, and then just always had a positive outlook on life. And also made me do very difficult physical activity, as you mentioned, just to humble you. Kids these days are soft kind of energy, which I'm deeply, deeply grateful for on all fronts, including just having hardship and including just physical hardship flung at me. I think that's really important.

Ivanka Trump

You wonder how much of who they were was a reaction to their experience. Would she have naturally had that forward-looking, grateful, optimistic orientation or was it a reaction to her childhood? I think about that. I look at this picture of my mom and she was unabashedly herself. She loved flamboyance and glamour, and in some ways I think it probably was a direct reaction to this very austere, controlled childhood. This was one expression of it. I think how she dressed and how she presented, I think her entrepreneurial spirit and love of capitalism and all things American was another manifestation of it and one that I grew up with. I remember the story she used to tell me about when she was 14 and she was going to neighboring countries, and as an athlete, you were given additional freedoms that you wouldn't otherwise be afforded in these societies under communist rule. So she was able to travel, where most of her friends never would be able to leave Czechoslovakia, and she would come back from all of these trips where she'd do ski races in Austria and elsewhere, and the first thing she had to do was check in at the local police. And she'd sit down, and she

had enough wisdom at 14 to know that she couldn't appear to be lying by not being impressed by what she saw and the fact that you could get an orange in the winter, but she couldn't be too excited by it that she'd become a flight risk.

Lex Fridman

Oh, boy.

Ivanka Trump

So give enough details that you are believable, but not so many that you're not trusted. And imagine that as a 14-year-old, that experience and having to navigate the world that way. And she told me that eventually all those local police officers, they came to love her because one of the things she'd do is smuggle stuff back from these countries and give it to them to give their wives perfume and stockings. So she figured out the system pretty quickly, but it's a very different experience from what I was navigating and the pressures and challenges me as a 14-year-old was dealing with, so I have so much respect and admiration for her.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, hardship clarifies what's important in life. You and I have talked about Man's Search for Meaning, that book. Having an ultimate hardship clarifies that finding joy in life is not about the environment, it's about your outlook on that environment. And there's beauty to be found in any situation. And also, in that particular situation, when everything is taken from you, the thing you start to think about is the people you love. So in the case of Man's Search for Meaning, Viktor Frankl thinking about his wife and how much he loves her, and that love was the flame, the warmth that kept him excited. The fun thing to think about when everything else is gone. So we sometimes forget that with the busyness of life, you get all this fun stuff we're talking about like building and being a creative force in the world. At the end of the day, what matters is just the other humans in your life, the people you love.

Ivanka Trump

A 100%.

Lex Fridman

It's the simple stuff.

Ivanka Trump

Viktor Frankl, that book and just his philosophy in general is so inspiring to me. But I think so many people, they say they want happiness, but they want conditional happiness. When this and this a thing happens or under these circumstances, then I'll be happy. And I think what he showed is that we can cultivate these virtues within ourselves regardless of the situation we find ourselves in. And in some ways, I think the meaning of life is the search for meaning in life. It's the relationships we have and we form. It's the experience we have. It's

how we deal with the suffering that life inevitably presents to us. And Viktor Frankl does an amazing job highlighting that under the most horrific circumstances, and I think it's just super inspiring to me.

Lex Fridman

He also shows that you can get so much from just small joys, like getting a little more soup today than you did yesterday. It's the little stuff. If you allow yourself to love the little stuff of life, it's all around you. It's all there. So you don't need to have these ambitious goals and the comparison being a thief of joy, that kind of stuff. It's all around us. The ability to eat. When I was in the jungle and I got severely dehydrated, because there's no water, you run out of water real quick. And the joy I felt when I got to drink. I didn't care about anything else. Speaking of things that matter in life, I would start to fantasize about water, and that was bringing me joy.

Ivanka Trump

You can tap into this feeling at any time.

Lex Fridman

Exactly. I was just tapping in, just to stay positive.

Ivanka Trump

Just go into your bathroom, turn on the sink and watch the water to feel good.

Lex Fridman

Oh, for sure. For sure. It's good to have stuff taken away for a time. That's why struggle is good, to make you appreciate it. To have a deep gratitude for when you have it. And water and food is a big one, but water is the biggest one. I wouldn't recommend it necessarily, to get severely dehydrated to appreciate water, but maybe every time you take a sip of water, you can have that kind of gratitude.

Ivanka Trump

There's a prayer in Judaism you're supposed to say every morning, which is basically thanking God for your body working. It's something so basic, but it's when it doesn't that we're grateful. So just reminding ourselves every day the basic things of a functional body, of our health, of access to water, which so many millions of people around the world do not have reliably, is very clarifying and super important.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, health is a gift. Water is a gift.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Is there a memory with your mom that had a defining effect on your life?

Ivanka Trump

I have these vignettes in my mind, seeing her in action in different capacities, a lot of times in the context of things that I would later go on to do myself. So I would go almost every day after school, and I'd go to the Plaza Hotel and I'd follow her around as she'd walk the hallways and just observe her. And she was so impossibly glamorous. She was doing everything in four-and-a-half-inch heels, with this bouffant. It's almost an inaccessible visual. But I think for me, when I saw her experience the most joy tended to be by the sea, almost always. Not a pool. And I think I get this from her. Pools, they're fine. I love the ocean. I love saltwater. I love the way it makes me feel, and I think I got that from her. So we would just swim together all the time. And it's a lot of what I love about Miami actually, being so close to the ocean. I find it to be super cathartic. But a lot of my memories of my mom, seeing her really just in her bliss, is floating around in a body of saltwater.

Lex Fridman

Is there also some aspect to her being an example of somebody that could be beautiful and feminine, but at the same time powerful, a successful businesswoman, that showed that it's possible to do that?

Ivanka Trump

Yeah, I think she really was a trailblazer. It's not uncommon in real estate for there to be multiple generations of people. And so on job sites, it was not unusual for me to run into somebody whose grandfather had worked with my grandfather in Brooklyn or Queens or whose father had worked with my mother. And they'd always tell me these stories about her rolling in and they'd hear the heels first. And a lot of times, the story would be like, "Oh gosh, really? It's two days after Christmas. We thought we'd get a reprieve." But she was very exacting. So I had this visual in my mind of her walking on rebar on the balls of her feet in these four-inch heels. I'm assuming she actually carried flats with her, but I don't know. That's not the visual I have. I loved the fact that she so embodied femininity and glamour and was so comfortable being tough and ambitious and determined and this unbelievable businesswoman and entrepreneur at a time when she was very much alone, even for me in the development world. And so many of the different businesses that I've been in, there really aren't women outside of sales and of marketing. You don't see as many women in the development space, in the construction space, even in the architecture and design space, maybe outside of interior design. And she was decades ahead of me, so I love hearing these stories. I love hearing somebody who's my peer tell me about their grandfather and their father and their experience with one of my parents. It's amazing.

Lex Fridman

And she did it all in four-inch heels.

Ivanka Trump

She did it. She used to say, "There's nothing that I can't do better in heels."

Lex Fridman

That's a good line.

Ivanka Trump

That would be your exact thing. And when I'd complain about wearing something, and it was the early nineties. Everything was all so uncomfortable, these fabrics and materials, and I would go back and forth between being super girly and a total tomboy. But she'd dress me up in these things and I'd be complaining about it and she'd say, "Ivanka, pain for beauty," which I happen to totally disagree with because I think there's nothing worse than being uncomfortable. So I haven't accepted or internalized all of this wisdom, so to speak, but it was just funny. She had a very specific point of view.

Lex Fridman

And full of good lines, pain for beauty.

Ivanka Trump

It's funny because just even in fashion, if something's uncomfortable, to me, there's nothing that looks worse than when you see somebody tottering around and their heels hurt them, so they're walking oddly, and they're not embodying their confidence in that regard. So I'm the opposite. I start with, "Well, I want to be comfortable," and that helps me be confident and in command.

Lex Fridman

A foundation for fashion for you is comfort. And on top of that, you build things that are beautiful.

Ivanka Trump

And it's not comfort like dowdy. There's that level of comfort, but-

Lex Fridman

Functional comfort.

Ivanka Trump

... but I think you have to, for me, I want to feel confident. And you don't feel confident when you're pulling at a garment or hobbling on heels that don't fit you properly. And she was never doing those things either, so I don't know how she was wearing stuff like that. That's a 40-pound beaded dress, and I know this because I have it and I wore it recently. And I got a work out walking to the elevator. This is a heavy dress. And you know what? It was worth it. It was great.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, she's making it look easy though.

Ivanka Trump

But she makes it look very, very easy.

Lex Fridman

Do you miss her?

Ivanka Trump

So much. It's unbelievable how dislocating the loss of a parent is. And her mother lives with me still, my grandmother who helped raise us, so that's very special. And I can ask her some of the questions that I would've... Sorry. I wanted to ask my own mom, but it's hard.

Lex Fridman

It was beautiful to see. I've gotten a chance to spend time with your family, to see so many generations together at the table. And there's so much history there.

Ivanka Trump

She's 97, and until she was around 94, she lived completely on her own. No help, no anything, no support. Now she requires really 24-hour care, and I feel super grateful that I'm able to give her that because that's what she did for me. It's amazing for me to have my children be able to grow up and know her stories, know her recipes, Czech dumplings and goulash and [foreign language 00:50:28] and all the other things she used to make me in my childhood. But she was a major force in my life. My mom was working, so my grandmother was the person who was always home every day when I came back from school. And I remember I used to shower and it would almost be comical. I feel like in my memory, and there was no washing machine I've seen on the planet that can actually do this, but in my memory, I'd go to shower and I dropped something on the bed and I'd come back into the room after my shower and it was folded, pressed. It was all my grandmother. She was running after me, taking care of me, and so it's nice to be able to do that for her.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Ivanka Trump

I got from her reading, my grandmother. She devoured books. Devoured books. She loved the more sensational ones. So some of these romance novels, I would pick them up, the covers, but she could look at any royal lineage across Europe and tell you all the mistresses.

Lex Fridman

All the drama?

Ivanka Trump

All the drama. She loved it. But her face was always buried in a book. My grandfather, he was the athlete. He swam professionally or on the national team for Czechoslovakia, and he helped train my mom, as I was saying before, in skiing. So he was a great athlete and she was at home and she would read and cook, and so that's something I remember a lot from my childhood. And she would always say, "I got reading from her."

Lex Fridman

Speaking of drama, I had my English teacher in high school recommended a book for me by D.H. Lawrence. It's supposed to be a classic. She's like, "This is a classic you should read." It's called *Lady Chatterly's Lover*. And I've read a lot of classics, but that one is straight-up a romance novel about a wife who is cheating with a gardener. And I remember reading this. In retrospect, I understand why it's a classic because it was so scandalous to talk about sex in a book a hundred years ago or whatever.

Ivanka Trump

In retrospect, you know why she recommended it to you?

Lex Fridman

I don't know. I think it's just sending a signal, "Hey, you need to get out more," or something. I don't know.

Ivanka Trump

Maybe she was seeking to inspire you.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, exactly. Anyway, I love that kind of stuff too, but I love all the classics. And there's a lot of drama. Human nature, drama is part of it. What about your dad? Growing up, what did you learn about life from your father?

Ivanka Trump

I think my father's sense of humor is sometimes underappreciated, so he had an amazing and has an amazing sense of humor. He loved music. I think my mom loved music as well, but my father always used to say that in another life he would've been a Broadway musical producer, which is hilarious to think about. But he loves music.

Lex Fridman

That is funny to think about.

Ivanka Trump

Right? Now he DJs at Mar-a-Lago. So people get a sense of he loves Andrew Lloyd Webber and all of it. Pavarotti, Elton John. These were the same songs on repeat my whole childhood, so I know the playlist.

Lex Fridman

Probably Sinatra and all that?

Ivanka Trump

Love Sinatra, loves Elvis, a lot of the greats. So I think I got a little bit of my love for music from him, but my mom shared that as well. One of the things in looking back that I think I inherited from my father as well is this interest or understanding of the importance of asking questions, and specifically questions of the right people, and I saw this a lot on job sites. I remember with the old post office building, there was this massive glass-topped atrium, so heating and cooling the structure was a Herculean lift. We had the mechanical engineers provide their thoughts on how we could do it efficiently, and so that the temperature never varied, and it was enormously expensive as an undertaking. I remember one of his first times on the site, because he had really empowered me with this project, and he trusted me to execute and to also rope him in when I needed it. But one of the first time he visits, we're walking the hallway and we're talking about how expensive this cooling system would be and heating system would be. And he starts stopping and he's asking duct workers as we walk what they think of the system that the mechanical engineers designed. First few, fine, not great answers. The third guy goes, "Sir, if you want me to be honest with you, it's obscenely over-designed. In the circumstance of a 1000-year storm, you will have the exact perfect temperature, if there's a massive blizzard or if it's unbearably hot, but 99.9% of the time you'll never need it. And so I think it's just an enormous waste of money." And so he kept asking that guy questions, and we ended up overhauling the design pretty well into the process of the whole system, saving a lot of money, creating a great system that's super functional. And so I learned a lot, and that's just one example of countless. That one really sticks out of in my head because I'm like, "Oh my gosh, we're redesigning the whole system." We were actively under construction. But I would see him do that on a lot of different issues. He would ask people on the work level what their thoughts were. Ideas, concepts, designs. And there was almost like a Socratic first principles type of way he questioned people, trying to get down to trying to reduce complex things to something really fundamental and simple. So I try to do that myself to the best I can, and I think it's something I very much learned from him.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I've seen great engineers, great leaders do just that. You see, you want to do that a lot, which is basically ask questions to push simplification. Can we do this simpler? The basic question is, "Why are we doing it this way? Can this be done simpler?" And not taking as an answer that this is how we've always done it. It doesn't matter that's how we've always done

it. What is the right way to do it? And usually, the simpler it is, the more correct the way. It has to do with costs, has to do with simplicity of production, manufacture, but usually simple is best.

Ivanka Trump

And it's oftentimes not the architecture or the engineers. It's in Elon's case probably the line worker who sees things more clearly. So I think making sure it's not just that you're asking good questions, you're asking the right people those same good questions.

Lex Fridman

That's why a lot of the Elon companies are really flat in terms of organizational design, where anybody on the factory floor can talk directly to Elon. There's not this managerial class, this hierarchy, where [inaudible 00:58:16] have to travel up and down the hierarchy, which large companies often construct this hierarchy of managers where no one manager, if you ask them the question of what have you done this week, the answer is really hard to come up with. Usually, it's going to be a bunch of paperwork, so nobody knows what they're actually do. So when it's flat, you can actually get as quickly as possible with when problems arise, you can solve those problems as quickly as possible. And also, you have a direct, rapid, iterative process where you're making things simpler, making them more efficient, and constantly improving. Yeah. It's interesting. You see this in government. A lot of people get together, a hierarchy is developed, and sometimes it's good, but very often just slows things down. And you see great companies, great, great companies, Apple, Google, Meta, they have to fight against that bureaucracy that builds, the slowness that large organizations have. And to still be a big organization and act like a startup is the big challenge.

Ivanka Trump

It's super difficult to deconstruct that as well once it's in place. It's circumventing layers and asking questions, probing questions, of people on the ground level is a huge challenge to the authority of the hierarchy. And there's tremendous amount of resistance to it. So it's how do you grow something, in the case of a company, in terms of a culture that can scale but doesn't lose its connection to real and meaningful feedback? It's not easy.

Lex Fridman

I've had a lot of conversations with Jim Keller, who's this legendary engineer and leader, and he has talked about you often have to be a little bit of an asshole in the room. Not in a mean way, but it is uncomfortable. A lot of these questions, they're uncomfortable. They break the general politeness and civility that people have in communication. When you get a meeting, nobody wants to be like, "Can we do it way different?" Everyone wants to just like, "This lunch is coming up, I have this trip planned on the weekend with the family." Everyone just wants comfort. When humans get together, they gravitate towards comfort. Nobody wants

that one person that comes in and says, "Hey, can we do this way better and way different, and everything we've gotten comfortable with, throw it out?"

Ivanka Trump

Not only do they not want that, but the one person who comes in and does that puts a massive target on their back and is ultimately seen as a threat. Nobody really gets fired for maintaining the status quo, even if things go poorly. It's the way it was always done.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, humans are fascinating. But in order to actually do great big projects, to reach for the stars, you have to have those people. You have to constantly disrupt and have those uncomfortable conversations.

Ivanka Trump

And really have that first principles type of orientation, especially in those large bureaucratic contexts.

Lex Fridman

So amongst many other things, you created a fashion brand. What was that about? What was the origin of that?

Ivanka Trump

I always loved fashion as a form of self-expression, as a means to communicate either a truth or an illusion, depending on what kind of mood you were in. But this second body, if you- ... kind of mood you were in, but this sort of second body, if you will. So I loved fashion and look, I mean my mother was a big part of the reason I did, but I never thought I would go into fashion. In fact, I was graduating from Warden, it was the day of my graduation and Winter calls me up and offered me a job at Vogue, which is a dream in so many ways, but I was so focused. I wanted to go into real estate and I wanted to build buildings, and I told her that. So I really thought that that was going to be the path I was taking and then very organically fashion, it was part of my life, but it came into my life in a more professional capacity by talking with my first of many different partners that I had in the fashion space about... He actually had showed me a building to buy. His family had some real estate holdings and I passed on the real estate deal. But we forged a friendship and we started talking about how in the space that he was in, fine jewelry, there was this lack of product and brands that were positioned for self-purchasing females. So everything was about the man buying the Christmas gift, the man buying the engagement ring. The stores felt like that they were all tailored towards the male aesthetic. The marketing felt like that. And what about the woman who had a salary and was really excited to buy herself a great pair of earrings or had just received a great bonus and was going to use it to treat herself? So we thought there was a void in the marketplace, and that was the first category. I launched Ivanka Trump Fine Jewelry, and we just caught lightning in a bottle. It was really quickly

after that I met my partner who had founded Nine West Shoes, really capable partner, and we launched a shoe collection which took off and did enormously well and then a clothing collection and handbags and sunglasses and fragrance. So we caught a moment and we found a positioning for the self-purchasing multidimensional woman. And we made dressing for work aspirational. At the time, we launched if you wanted to buy something for an office context, the brands that existed were the opposite of exciting. Nobody was taking pictures of what they were wearing to work and posting it online with some of these classic legacy brands. Really, it felt very much like it was designed by a team of men for what a woman would want to wear to the office. So we started creating this clothing that was feminine, that was beautiful, that was versatile, that would take a woman from the boardroom to an after-school soccer game to a date night with a boyfriend, to a walk in the park with their husband. All the different ways women live their lives and creating a wardrobe for that woman who works at every aspect of their life, not just sort of the siloed professional part. And it was really compelling. We started creating great brand content and we had incredible contributors like Adam Grant who was blogging for us at the time and creating aspirational content for working women. It was actually kind of a funny story, but I now had probably close to 11 different product categories and we were growing like wildfire and I started to think about what would be a compelling way to create interesting content for the people who were buying these different categories. And we came up with a website called Women Who Work, and I went to a marketing agency, one of the fancy firms in New York, and I said, "We want to create a brand campaign around this multidimensional woman who works and what do you think? Can you help us?" And they come back and they say, "You know what? We don't like the word work. We think it should be women who do." And I just start laughing because I'm like women who do. And the fact that they couldn't conceive of it being sort of exciting and aspirational and interesting to sort of lean into working at all aspects of our lives was just fascinating to me, but showed that that was part of the problem. And I think that's why ultimately, I mean when the business grew to be hundreds of millions of dollars in sales, we were distributed at all the best retailers across the country from Neiman Marcus, to Saks to Bloomingdale's and beyond. And I think it really resonated with people in an amazing way and probably not dissimilar to how I have this incredible experience every time somebody comes up to me and tells me that they were married in a space that I had painstakingly designed, I have that experience now with my fashion company. The number of women who will come up tell me that they loved my shoes or they loved the handbags, and I've had women show me their engagement rings. They got engaged with us and it's really rewarding. It's really beautiful.

Lex Fridman

When I was hanging out with you in Miami, the number of women that came up to you saying they love the clothing, they love the shoes is awesome.

Ivanka Trump

All these years later.

Lex Fridman

All these years later. What does it take to make a shoe where somebody would come up to you years later and just be just full of love for this thing you've created? What's that mean? What does it take to do that?

Ivanka Trump

Well, I still wear the shoes.

Lex Fridman

I mean, that's a good starting point, right? Is to create a thing that you want to wear.

Ivanka Trump

I feel like the product... I think first and foremost, you have to have the right partner. So building a shoe, if you talk to a great shoe designer, it's like it's architecture. Making a heel that's four inches that feels good to walk in for eight hours a day, that is an engineering feat. And so I found great partners in everything that I did. My shoe partner had founded Nine West, so he really knew what went into making a shoe wearable and comfortable. And then you overlay that with great design and we also created this really comfortable, beautifully designed, super feminine product offering that was also affordably priced. So I think it was the trifecta of those three things that I think it made it stand out for so many people.

Lex Fridman

I don't know if it's possible to articulate, but can you speak to the process you go through from idea to the final thing, what you go through to bring an idea to life?

Ivanka Trump

So not being a designer, and this was true in real estate as well, I was never the architect, so I didn't necessarily have the pen. And in fashion, the same way. I was kind of like a conductor. I knew what I liked and didn't like, and I think that's really important and that became honed for me over time. So I would have to sit a lot longer with something earlier on than later when I had more refined my aesthetic point of view. And so I think first of all, you have to have a pretty strong sense of what resonates with you. And then in the case of my fashion business, as it grew and became quite a large business and I had so many different categories, everything had to work together. So I had individual partners for each category, but if we were selling at Neiman Marcus, we couldn't have a pair of shoes that didn't relate to a dress, that didn't relate to a pair of sunglasses and handbags all on the same floor. So in the beginning, it was much more collaborative. As time passed, I really sort of took the point on deciding, this is the aesthetic for the season, these are the colors we're going to use, these are fabrics, and then working with our partners on the execution of that. But I needed to create an overlay that allowed for cohesion as the collection grew. And that was actually really fun for me because that was a little different. I was typically initially responding to things that were put in front of me, and towards the end it was my partners who were

responding to the things that myself and my team... But I always wanted to bring the best talent in. So I was hiring great designers and printmakers and copywriters. And so I had this almost like... That conductor analogy. I had this incredible group of, in this case, women assembled who had very strong points of view themselves and it created a great team.

Lex Fridman

So yeah, I mean, great team is really sort of essential. It's the essential thing behind any successful story.

Ivanka Trump

A 100%.

Lex Fridman

But there's this thing of taste, which is really interesting because it's hard to articulate what it takes, but basically knowing A versus B what looks good. Or without A-B comparison to say, "If we changed this part, that would make it better." That sort of designer taste, that's hard to make explicit what that is, but the great designers have that taste, like, "This is going to look good." And it's not actually... Again, the Steve Jobs thing, it's not the opinion poll. You can't poll people and ask them what looks better. You have to have the vision of that. And as you said, you also have to develop eventually the confidence that your taste is good, such that you can curate, you can direct teams. You can argue that no, no, no, this is right. Even when there's several people that say, "This doesn't make any sense." If you have that vision, have the confidence, this will look good. That's how you come up with great designs. It's a mixture of great tastes as do develop over time and the confidence.

Ivanka Trump

And that's a really hard thing especially, and I think one of the things that I love most about all of these creative pursuits is that ability to work with the best people. Right now I'm working with my husband. We have this 1400 acre island in the Mediterranean and we're bringing in the best architects and the best brands. But to have a point of view and to challenge people who are such artists respectfully, but not to be afraid to ask questions, it takes a lot of confidence to do that. And it's hard. So these are actually just internal early renderings. So we're in the process of doing the master planning now, but -

Lex Fridman

This is beautiful. I mean, it's on a side of a mountain.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah, this is an early vision. Yeah, it's going to be extraordinary. Amman's going to operate the hotel for us, and they're going to be villas, and we have Carbone who's going to be doing the food and beverage. But it's amazing to bring together all of this talent. And for me to be able to play around and flex the real estate muscles again and have some fun with it is -

Lex Fridman

The real estate, the design, the art. How hard is it to bring something like that to life because that looks surreal, out of this world?

Ivanka Trump

Well, especially on an island, it's challenging, meaning the logistics of even getting the building materials to an island are no joke, but we will execute on it. And it may not be this. This is sort of, as I said, early conceptual drawings, but it gives a sense of wanting to honor the topography that exists. And this is obviously very modern, but making it feel right in terms of the context of the vegetation and the terrain that exists is, and not just have a beautiful glass box. Obviously you want glass. You want to look out and see that gorgeous blue ocean, but how do you do that in a way that doesn't feel generic and isn't a squandered opportunity to create something new?

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And it's integrated with a natural landscape. It's a celebration of the natural landscape around it. So I guess you start from this dream-like... Because this feels like a dream. And then when you're faced with the reality of the building materials and all the actual constraints of the building, then it evolves from there, right?

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. And I mean so much of architecture you don't see, but it's decisions made. So how do you create independent structures where you look out of one and don't see the other? How do you ensure the stacking and the master plan works in a way that's harmonious and view corridors? And all of those elements, all of those components of decision-making are super appreciated, but not often thought about.

Lex Fridman

What's a view corridor?

Ivanka Trump

To make sure that the top unit, you're not looking out and seeing a whole bunch of units, you're looking out and seeing the ocean. So that's where you take this and then you start angling everything and you start thinking about, "Well, in this context, do we have green roofs?" If there's any hint of a roof, it's camouflaged by vegetation that matches what already exists on the island. That's where the engineers become very important. How do you build into a mountainside while being sensitive to the beauty of the island?

Lex Fridman

It's almost like a mathematical problem. I took a class, computational geometry in grad school, where you have to think about these view corridors. It's like a math problem, but it's also an art problem because it's not just about making sure that there's no occlusions to the

view. You have to figure out when there is occlusions, what is a vegetation. So you have to figure all that out. And there's probably... So every single room, every single building is a thing that adds extra complexity.

Ivanka Trump

And then the choices, how does the sun rise and set? So how do you want to angle the hotel in relation to the sunrise and the sunset? You obviously want people to experience those. So which do you favor the directionality of the wind and on an island, and in this case, the wind's coming from the north and the vegetation is less lush on the northern end. So do you focus more on the southern end and have the horseback riding trails and amenities up towards the north? So there are these really interesting decisions and choices you get to reflect on.

Lex Fridman

That's a fascinating sort of discussion to be having. And probably there's actual constraints on infrastructure issues. So all of those are constraints.

Ivanka Trump

Well, the grade of the land, if it's super steep. So also finding the areas of topography that are flatter but still have the great views. So it's fun. I think real estate and building, it's like a giant puzzle. And I love puzzles. Every piece relates to another, and it's all sort of interconnected.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Like you sit in a post office, every single room is different. So every single room is a puzzle when you're doing the renovation. That's fascinating.

Ivanka Trump

And if you're not thoughtful, it's at best, really quirky. At worst, completely ridiculous.

Lex Fridman

Quirky is such a funny word. It's such a-

Ivanka Trump

I'm sure you've walked into your fair share of quirky rooms. And sometimes that's charming, but most often it's charming when it's intentional through smart design.

Lex Fridman

You can tell if it's by accident or if it's intentional. You can tell. So much... I mean, the whole hospitality thing. It's not just how it's designed. It's how once the thing is operating, if it's a hotel, how everything comes together, the culture of the place.

Ivanka Trump

And the warmth. I think with spaces, you can feel the soul of a structure. And I think on the hotel side, you have to think about flow of traffic, use, all these things. When you're building condominiums or your own home, you want to think about the warmth of a space as well. And especially with super modern designs, sometimes warmth is sacrificed. And I think there is a way to sort of marry both, and that's where you get into the interior design elements and disciplines and how fabrics can create tremendous warmth in a space which is otherwise sort of colder, raw building materials. And that's a really interesting... How texture matters, how color matters. And I think oftentimes interior design is not... It doesn't take the same priority. And I think that underestimates the impact it can have on how you experience a room or space.

Lex Fridman

Especially when it's working together with the architecture. Yeah, fabrics and color. That's so interesting.

Ivanka Trump

Finishes, the choice of wood.

Lex Fridman

That's making me feel horrible about the space we're sitting in. It's like black curtains, the warmth. I need to work on this.

Ivanka Trump

No comment.

Lex Fridman

This is a big [inaudible 01:19:52] item. You're making me... I'll listen back this over and over.

Ivanka Trump

I think you may need... There may be a woman's touch needed.

Lex Fridman

A lot. A lot.

Ivanka Trump

But I actually... I appreciate the vegetation.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's fake plants. Fake green plants.

Ivanka Trump

You know what I love about this space though is like you come through. Every single element-

Lex Fridman

There's a story behind it.

Ivanka Trump

There's a story behind it. So it's not just some... You didn't have some interior designer curate your bookshelf. It's like nobody came in here with books by the yard.

Lex Fridman

This is basically an Ikea... This is not deeply thought through, but it does bring me joy. Which is one way to do design. As long as you're happy, if your taste is decent enough, that means others will be happy or will see the joy radiate through it. But I appreciate you were grasping for compliments and you eventually got there.

Ivanka Trump

No, I actually... I love it. I love it. Do you have a little... I love this guy.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, you're holding on to a monkey looking at a human skull, which is particularly irrelevant.

Ivanka Trump

I feel like you've really thought about all of these things.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, there's robot... I don't know how much you've looked into robots, but there's a way to communicate love and affection from a robot that I'm really fascinated by. And a lot of cartoonists do this too. When you create cartoons and non-human-like entities, you have to bring out the joy. So with Wall-E or robots in Star Wars, to be able to communicate emotion, anger and excitement through a robot is really interesting to me. And people that do it successfully are awesome.

Ivanka Trump

Does that make you smile?

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that makes me smile for sure. There's a longing there.

Ivanka Trump

How do you do that successfully as you bring them, your projects to life?

Lex Fridman

I think there's so many detailed elements that I think artists know well, but one basic one is something that people know and you now know because you have a dog is the excitement that a dog has when you first show up. Just the recognizing you and catching your eye and just showing his excitement by wiggling his butt and tail and all this intense joy that overtakes his body, that moment of recognizing something. It's the double take, that moment of where this joy of recognition takes over your whole cognition and you're just there and there's a connection. And then the other person gets excited and you both get excited together. It's kind of like that feeling... How would I put it? When you go to airports and you get to see people who haven't seen each other for a time all of a sudden recognize each other in their meeting and they're all run towards each other in a hug? That moment. By the way, that's awesome to watch. There's so much joy.

Ivanka Trump

And dogs though will have that, every time. You could walk into the other room to get a glass of milk and you come back and your dog sees you like it's the first time. So I love replicating that in robots. They actually say children... One of the reasons why Peek-A-Boo is so successful is that they actually don't remember not having seen you a few seconds prior. There's a term for it, but I remember when my kids were younger, you leave the room and you walk back in 30 seconds later and they experienced the same joy as if you had been gone for four hours. And we grow out of that. We become very used to one another.

Lex Fridman

I kind of want to forever be excited by the Peek-A-Boo phenomena, the simple joys. We're talking about on fashion, having the confidence of taste to be able to sort of push through on this idea of a design. But you've also mentioned somebody you admire is Rick Rubin in his book, *The Creative Act*. It has some really interesting ideas, and one of them is to accept self-doubt and imperfection. So is there some battle within yourself that you have on sort of striving for perfection and for the confidence and always kind of having it together versus accepting that things are always going to be imperfect?

Ivanka Trump

I think every day. I think I wake up in the morning and I want to be better. I want to be a better mom. I want to be a better wife. I want to be more creative. I want to be physically stronger. And so that very much lives within me all the time. I think I also grew up in the context of being the child of two extraordinarily successful parents, and that could have been debilitating for me. And I saw that in a lot of my friends who grew up in circumstances similar to that. They were afraid to try for fear of not measuring up. And I think somehow early on I learned to kind of harness the fear of not being good enough, not being competent enough, and I harnessed it to make me better and to push me outside of my comfort zone. So I think that's always lived with me, and I think it probably always will. I think you have to have humility in anything you do that you could be better and strive for that. I think as you

get older, it softens a little bit as you have more reps, as you have more examples of having been thrown in the deep end and figured out how to swim. You get a little bit more comfortable in your abstract competency. But if that fear is not in you, I think you're not challenging yourself enough.

Lex Fridman

Harness the fear. The other thing he writes about is intuition, that you need to trust your instincts and intuition. That's a very recruitment thing to say. So what percent of your decision making is intuition or what percent is through rigorous careful analysis, would you say?

Ivanka Trump

I think it's both. It's like trust, but verify. I think that's also where age and experience comes into play, because I think you always have sort of a gut instinct, but I think well-honed intuition comes from a place of accumulated knowledge. So oftentimes when you feel really strongly about something, it's because you've been there, you know what's right. Or on a personal level, if you're acting in accordance with your core values, it just feels good. And even if it would be the right decision for others, if you're acting outside of your integrity or core values, it doesn't feel good and your intuition will signal that to you. You'll never be comfortable. So I think because of that, I start oftentimes with my intuition and then I put it through a rigorous test of whether that is in fact true. But very seldom do I go against what my initial instinct was, at least at this point in my life.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I had actually a discussion yesterday with a big time business owner investor who's talking about being impulsive and following that on a phone call, shifting the entire everything... Giving away a very large amount of money and moving it in another direction on an impulse. Making a promise that he can't at that time deliver, but knows if he works hard, he'll deliver and all... Just following that impulsive feeling. And he said now that he has a family, that probably some of that impulse is quieted down a little bit. He's more rational and thoughtful and so on, but wonders whether it's sometimes good to just be impulsive and to just trust your gut and just go with it. Don't deliberate too long because then you won't do it. It's interesting. It's the confidence and stupidity maybe of youth that leads to some the greatest breakthroughs, and there's a cost to wisdom and deliberation.

Ivanka Trump

There is. But I actually think in this case, as you get older, you may act less impulsively, but I think you're more like attuned with... You have more experience, so your gut is more well honed. So your instincts are more well honed. I think I found that to be true for me. It doesn't feel as reckless as when I was younger.

Lex Fridman

Amongst many other things. You were on The Apprentice. People love you on there. People love the show. So what did you learn about business, about life from the various contestants on there?

Ivanka Trump

Well, I think you can learn everything about life from Joan Rivers, so I'm just-

Lex Fridman

Got it. Just from that one human.

Ivanka Trump

Going to go with that. She was amazing. But it was such a wild experience for me because I was quite young when I was on it just getting started in business, and it was the number one television show in the country, and it went on to be syndicated all over the world, and it was just this wild, phenomenal success. A business show had never crossed over in this sort of way. So it was really a moment in time and you had regular Apprentice and then the Celebrity Apprentice. But the tasks, I mean, they went on to be studied at business schools across the country. So every other week, I'd be reading case studies of how The Apprentice was being examined and taught to classes and this university in Boston. So it was extraordinary. And this was a real life classroom I was in. So I think because of the nature of the show, you learn a lot about teamwork and you're watching it and analyzing it real time. A lot of the tasks were very marketing oriented because of the short duration of time they had to execute. You learned a lot about time management because of that short duration. So almost every episode would devolve into people hysterical over the fact that they had 10 minutes left with this Herculean lift ahead of them. So it was a fascinating experience for me. And we would be filming... I mean, we would film first thing in the morning at 5 or 6 AM in Trump Tower, oftentimes. In the lobby of Trump Tower, that's where the war rooms and boardrooms of the candidates were, the contestants were. And then we would go up in the elevator to our office. We would work all day, and then we'd come down and we'd evaluate the task. It was this weird real life television thing experience in the middle of our... Sort of on the bookends of our work day. So it was intense.

Lex Fridman

So you're curating the television version of it and also living it?

Ivanka Trump

Living the... And oftentimes there was an overlay. There were episodes that they came up with brand campaigns for my shoe collection or my clothing line or design challenges related to a hotel I was responsible for building. So there was this unbelievable crossover that was obviously great for us from a business perspective, but it's sometimes surreal to experience.

Lex Fridman

What was it like? Was it scary to be in front of a camera when you know so many people watch? I mean, that's a new experience for you at that time. Just the number of people watching. Was that weird?

Ivanka Trump

It was really weird. I really struggled watching myself on the episodes. I still to this day... Television as a medium, the fact that we're taping this, I'm more self-conscious than if we weren't. I just... It's-

Lex Fridman

Hey, I have to watch myself. After we record this, before I publish it, I have to- To record this before I publish it, I have to listen to my stupid self talk.

Ivanka Trump

So you're saying it doesn't get better?

Lex Fridman

It doesn't get better.

Ivanka Trump

I still, I hear myself, I'm like, "Does my voice really sound like that?" Why do I do this thing or that thing? And I find it some people are super at ease and who knows, maybe they're not either. But some people feel like they're super at ease.

Lex Fridman

Feel like they are, yeah.

Ivanka Trump

Like my father was. I think who you saw is who you get, and I think that made him so effective in that medium because he was just himself and he was totally unselfconscious. I was not, I was totally self-conscious. So it was extraordinary, but also a little challenging for me.

Lex Fridman

I think certain people are just born to be entertainers. Like Elvis on stage, they come to life. This is where they're truly happy. I've met guys like that. Great rock stars. This is where they feel like they belong, on stages. It's not just a thing they do and there's certain aspects they love, certain aspects they don't. This is where they're alive. This is where they've always dreamed of being. This is where they want to be forever.

Ivanka Trump

Michael Jackson was like that.

Lex Fridman

Michael Jackson. I saw pictures of you hanging out with Michael Jackson. That was cool.

Ivanka Trump

He came once to a performance. At one moment in time I wanted to be a professional ballerina.

Lex Fridman

Okay, yes.

Ivanka Trump

And I was working really hard. I was going to the School of American Ballet. I was dancing at the Lincoln Center in the Nutcracker. I was super serious, nine, 10-year-old. And my parents came to a Christmas performance of the Nutcracker and my father brought Michael Jackson with him. And everyone was so excited that all the dancers, they wore one glove. But I remember he was so shy. He was so quiet when you'd see him in smaller group settings. And then you'd watch him walk onto to stage and it was like a completely different person, like the vitality that came into him. And you say that's like someone who was born to do what he did. And I think there are a lot of performers like that.

Lex Fridman

And I just in general love to see people that have found the thing that makes them come alive. I, as I mentioned, went to the jungle recently with Paul Rosolie, and he's a guy who just belongs in the jungle. That's a guy where when I got a chance to go with him from the city to the jungle, and you just see this person change, of the happiness, the joy he has when he first is able to jump in the water of Amazon River and to feel like he's home with the crocodiles, and all that, with his calling friends and probably dances around in the trees with the monkeys. So this is where he belongs, and I love seeing that.

Ivanka Trump

You felt that. I mean, I watched the interview you did with him and he felt that his passion and enthusiasm, it radiated. And I mean, I love animals. I love all animals. Never loved snakes so much. And he almost made me, now I appreciate the beauty of them much more than I did prior to listening to him speak about them. But it's an infectious thing. He actually, we were talking about skyscrapers before. I loved it. He called trees skyscrapers of life, and I thought that was so great.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, and they are. They're so big. Just like skyscrapers or large buildings, they also represent a history, especially in Europe. I like to think, looking at all these ancient buildings, you like to think of all the people throughout history that have looked at them, have admired them, have been inspired by them. The great leaders of history. In France it's like Napoleon, just the history that's contained within a building, you almost feel the energy of that history. You can feel the stories emanate from the buildings. And that same way when you look at giant trees that have been there for decades, for centuries in some cases, you feel the history, the stories emanate. I got a chance to climb some of them, so you feel like there's a visceral feeling of the power of the trees. It's cool.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. That's an experience I'd love to have, be that disconnected.

Lex Fridman

Being in the jungle among the trees, among the animals, you remember that you're forever a part of nature. You're fundamentally our nature, Earth is a living organism and you're a part of that organism. And that's humbling, that's beautiful, and you get to experience that in a real, real way. It sounds simple to say, but when you actually experience it stays with you for a long time. Especially if you're out there alone. I got a chance to spend time in the jungle solo, just by myself. And you sit in the fear of that, in the simplicity of that, all of it, and just no sounds of humans anywhere. You're just sitting there and listening to all the monkeys and the birds trying to have sex with each other, all around you just screaming. And I mean, I romanticize everything, there's birds that are monogamous for life, like macaws, you could see two of them flying. They're also, by the way, screaming at each other. I always wonder, "Are they arguing or is this their love language?"

Ivanka Trump

That's very funny.

Lex Fridman

You just have these two birds that have been together for a long time and they're just screaming at each other in the morning.

Ivanka Trump

That's really funny, because there aren't that many animal species that are monogamous. And you highlighted one example, but they literally sound like they're bickering.

Lex Fridman

But maybe to them it was beautiful. I don't want to judge, but they do sound very loud and very obnoxious. But amidst all of that it's just, I don't know.

Ivanka Trump

I think it's so humbling to feel so small too. I feel like when we get busy and when we're running around, it's easy to feel we're so in our head and we feel sort of so consequential in the context of even our own lives. And then you find yourself in a situation like that, and I think you feel so much more connected knowing how minuscule you are in the broader sense. And I feel that way when I'm on the ocean on a surfboard. It's really humbling to be so small amidst that vast sea. And it feels really beautiful with no noise, no chatter, no distractions, just being in the moment. And it sounds like you experienced that in a very, very real way in the Amazon.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, the power of the waves is cool. I love swimming out into the ocean and feeling the power of the ocean underneath you, and you're just like this speck.

Ivanka Trump

And you can't fight it, right?

Lex Fridman

Right.

Ivanka Trump

You just have to sort of be in it. And I think in surfing, one of the things I love about it is I feel like a lot of water sports you're manipulating the environment. And there's something that can be a little violent about it, like you look at windsurfing. Whereas with surfing, you're in harmony with it. So you're not fighting it, you're flowing with it. And you still have the agency of choosing which waves you're going to surf, and you sit there and you read the ocean and you learn to understand it, but you can't control it.

Lex Fridman

What's it like to fall in your face when you're trying to surf? I haven't surfed before. It just feels like I always see videos of when everything goes great. I just wonder when it doesn't.

Ivanka Trump

Those are the ones people post. No, well, I actually had the unique experience of one of my first times surfing. I only learned a couple of years ago, so I'm not good, I just love it. I love everything about it. I love the physicality, I love being in the ocean, I love everything about it. The hardest thing with surfing is paddling out, because when you're committing, you catch a wave, obviously sometimes you flip over your board and that doesn't feel great. But when you're in the line of impact and you've maybe surfed a good wave in and now you're going out for another set, and you get stuck in that impact line, there's nothing you can do. You just sit there and you try to dive underneath it and it will pound you and pound you. So, I've been stuck there while four or five, six waves just crash on top of your head. And the worst thing

you can do is get reactive and scared, and try and fight against it. You just have to flow with it until inevitably there's a break and then paddle like hell back out to the line, or to the beach, whatever you're feeling. But to me that's the hardest part, the paddling out.

Lex Fridman

How did life change when your father decided to run for president?

Ivanka Trump

Wow, everything changed almost overnight. We learned that he was planning to announce his candidacy two weeks before he actually did. And nothing about our lives had been constructed with politics in mind. Most often when people are exposed to politics at that level, that sort of national level, there's first city council run, and then maybe a state-level run, and maybe, maybe congress, senator ultimately the presidency. So it was unheard of for him never to have run a campaign and then run for president and win. So it was an extraordinary experience. There was so much intensity and so much scrutiny and so much noise. So that took for sure a moment to acclimate to. I'm not sure I ever fully acclimated, but it definitely was a super unusual experience. But I think then the process that unfolded over the next couple of years was also the most extraordinary growth experience of my life. Suddenly, I was going into communities that I probably never would have been to, and I was talking with people who in 30 seconds would reveal to me their deepest insecurity, their gravest fear, their wildest ambitions, all of it, with the hope that in telling me that story, it would get back to a potential future President of the United States and have impacts for their family, for their community. So, the level of candor and vulnerability people have with you is unlike anything I've ever experienced. And I had done The Apprentice before, people may know who I was in some of these situations that I was going into, but they wouldn't have shared with me these things that you got the impression that oftentimes their own spouses wouldn't know, and they wouldn't do so within 30 seconds. So you learn so much about what motivates people, what drives people, what their concerns are, and you grow so much as a result of it.

Lex Fridman

So when you're in the White House, people, unlike in any other position, people have a sense that all the troubles they're going through, maybe you can help, so they put it all out there.

Ivanka Trump

And they do so in such a raw, vulnerable, and real way. It's shocking and eyeopening and super motivating. I remember once I was in New Hampshire, and early on, right after my father had announced his candidacy, and a man walks up to me in the greeting line and within around five seconds he had started to tell me a story about how his daughter had died of an overdose, and how he was worried his son was also addicted to opioids, his daughter's friends, his son's friends. And it's heartbreaking. It's heartbreaking, and it's something that I would experience every day in talking with people.

Lex Fridman

And those stories just stay with you.

Ivanka Trump

Always.

Lex Fridman

I took a long road trip around the United States in my 20s, and I'm thinking of doing it again just for a couple of months for that exact purpose. And you can get these stories when you go to a bar in the middle of nowhere and just sit and talk to people and they start sharing. And it reminds you of how beautiful the country is. It reminds you of several things. One, that people, well, it shows you that there's a lot of different accents, that's for one. But aside from that, that people are struggling with all the same stuff. And at least at that time, I wonder what it is now, but at that time, I don't remember. On the surface, there's political divisions, there's Republicans and Democrats, and so on, but underneath it people were all the same. The concerns were all the same, there was not that much of a division. Right now, the surface division has been amplified even more maybe because of social media, I don't know why. So, I would love to see what the country's like now. But I suspect probably it's still not as divided as it appears to be on the surface, what the media shows, what the social media shows. But what did you experience in terms of the division?

Ivanka Trump

I think a couple reactions to what you just said. I think the first is when you connect with people like that, you are so inspired by their courage in the face of adversity and their resilience. And it's a truly remarkable experience for me. The campaign lifted me out of a bubble I didn't even know I was in. I grew up on the Upper East Side of New York and I felt like I was well traveled, and I believed at the time that I'd been exposed to divergent viewpoints. And I realized during the campaign how limited my exposure had been relative to what it was becoming, so there was a lot of growth in that as well. But I do think you think about the vitriol and politics and whether it's worse than it's been in the past or not, I think that's up for debate. I think there have been duels, there's been screaming, and politics has always been a blood sport, and it's always been incredibly vicious. I think in the toxic swirl of social media it's more amplified, and there's more democratization around participating in it perhaps, and it seems like the voices are louder, but it feels like it's always been that. But I don't believe most people are like that. And you meet people along the way and they're not leading with what their politics are. They're telling you about their hopes for themselves and their communities. And it makes you feel that we are a whole lot less divided than the media and others would have us believe.

Lex Fridman

Although, I have to say, having duels sounds pretty cool. Maybe I just romanticize westerns, but anyway. All right, I miss Clint Eastwood movies. Okay. But it's true. You read some of this

stuff in terms of what politics used to be in the history of the United States. Those folks went pretty rough, way rougher, actually. But they didn't have social media, so they had to go real hard. And the media was rough too. So all the fake news, all of that, that's not recent. It's been nonstop. I look at the surface division, the surface bickering, and that might be just a feature of democracy. It's not a bug of democracy, it's a feature. We're in a constant conflict, and it's the way we resolve, we try to figure out the right way forward. So in the moment, it feels like people are just tearing each other apart, but really we're trying to find a way, where in the long arc of history it will look like progress. But in the short term, it just sounds like people making stories up about other and calling each other names, and all this kind of stuff, but there's a purpose to it. I mean, that's what freedom looks like, I guess is what I'm trying to say, and it's better than the alternative.

Ivanka Trump

Well, I think that the vast majority of people aren't participating in it.

Lex Fridman

Sure, yes, that's true also.

Ivanka Trump

I think there's a minority of people that are doing most of the yelling and screaming, and the majority of Americans just want to send their kid to a great school, and want their communities to thrive, and want to be able to realize their dreams and aspirations. So, I saw a lot more of that than it would feel obvious if you looked at a Twitter feed.

Lex Fridman

What went into your decision to join the White House as an advisor?

Ivanka Trump

The campaign. I never thought about joining, it was like get to the end of it. And when it started, everything in my life was almost firing on all cylinders. I had two young kids at home. During the course of the campaign, I ended up, I was pregnant with my third, so this young family, my businesses, real estate and fashion, and working alongside my brothers running the Trump Hotel collection. My life was full and busy. And so, there was a big part of me that was just wanted to get through, just get through it, without really thinking forward to what the implications were for me. But when my father won, he asked Jared and I to join him. And in asking that question, keep in mind he was just a total outsider, so there was no bench of people as he would have today. He had never spent the night in Washington DC before staying in the White House. And so, when he asked us to join him, he trusted us. He trusted in our ability to execute. And there wasn't a part of me that could imagine the 70 or 80-year-old version of myself looking back and having been okay with having said no, and going back to my life as I knew it before. I mean, in retrospect, I realize there is no life as you know it before, but just the idea of not saying yes, wherever that would lead me. And so I

dove in. I was also, during the course of the campaign, I was just much more sensitive to the problems and experiences of Americans. I gave you an example before of the father in New Hampshire, but even just in my consumption of information. I had a business that was predominantly young women, many of which were thinking about having a kid, had just had a child, were planning on that life event. And I knew what they needed to be able to show up every day and realize this dream for themselves and the support structures they would need to have in place. And I remember reading this article at the time in one of the major newspapers of a woman, she had had a very solid job working at one of the blue chip accounting firms. And the recession came, she lost her job around the same time as her partner left her. And over a matter of months, she lost her home. So, she wound up with her two young kids, after bouncing around between neighbors living in their car. She gets a callback from one of the many interviews she had done for a second interview where she was all but guaranteed the job should that go well, and she had arranged childcare for her two young children with a neighbor in her old apartment block. And the morning of the interview, she shows up and the neighbor doesn't answer the doorbell. And she stands there five, 10 minutes, doesn't answer. So she has a choice: does she go to the interview with her children, or does she try to cancel? She gets in her car, drives to the interview, leaves her two children in the backseat of the car with the window cracked, goes into the interview and gets pulled out of the interview by police because somebody had called the cops after seeing her children in the backseat of the car. She gets thrown in jail, her kids get taken from her, and she spends years fighting to regain custody. And I think about, that's an extreme example, but I think about something like that. And I say, "If I was the mother and we were homeless, would I have gone to that interview?" And I probably would have, and that is not an acceptable situation. So you hear stories like that, and then you get asked, "Will you come with me?" And it's really hard to say no. I spent four years in Washington. I feel like I left it all in the field. I feel really good about it, and I feel really privileged to have been able to do what I did.

Lex Fridman

A chance to help many people. Saying no means you're turning away from those people.

Ivanka Trump

It felt like that to me.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. But then it's the turmoil of politics that you're getting into, and it really is a leap into the abyss. What was it like trying to get stuff done in Washington in this place where politics is a game? It feels that way maybe from an outsider perspective. And you go in there trying, given some of those stories, trying to help people. What's it like to get anything done?

Ivanka Trump

It's an incredible cognitive lift ...

Lex Fridman

That's a nice way to put it.

Ivanka Trump

... to get things done. There are a lot of people who would prefer to clinging to the problem and their talking points about how they're going to solve it, rather than sort of roll up their sleeves and do the work it takes to build coalitions of support, and find people who are willing to compromise and move the ball. And so it's extremely difficult. And Jared and I talk about it all the time, it probably should be, because these are highly consequential policies that impact people's lives at scale. It shouldn't be so easy to do them, and they are doable, but it's challenging. One of the first experiences I had where it really was just a full grind effort was with tax cuts and the work I did to get the child tax credit doubled as part of it. And it just meant meeting, after meeting, after meeting, after meeting with lawmakers, convincing them of why this is good policy, going into their districts, campaigning in their districts, helping them convince their constituents of why it's important, of why childcare support is important, of why paid family leave is important, of different policies that impact working American families. So it's hard, but it's really rewarding. And then to get it done, I mean, just the child tax credit alone, 40 million American families got an average of \$2,200 each year as a result of the doubling of the child tax credits. That was one component of tax cuts.

Lex Fridman

When I was researching this stuff, you just get to think the scale of things. The scale of impact is 40 million families, each one of those is a story, is a story of struggle, of trying to give a large part of your life to a job while still being able to give love and support and care to a family, to kids, and to manage all of that. Each one of those is a little puzzle that they have to solve. And it's a life and death puzzle. You can lose your home, your security, you can lose your job, you can screw stuff up with parenting, so you can mess all of that up and you're trying to hold it together, and government policies can help make that easier, or can in some cases make that possible. And you get to do that a scale out of five or 10 families, but 40 million families. And that's just one thing.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. The people who shared with me their experience, and during the campaign it was what they hoped to see happen. Once you were in there, it was what they were seeing, what they were experiencing, the result of the policies. And that was the fuel. On the hardest days, that was the fuel. Child tax credit. I remember visiting with a woman, Brittany Houseman, she came to the White House. She had two small children, she was pregnant with her third. Her husband was killed in a car accident. She was in school at the time. Her

dream was to become criminal justice advocate. That was no longer on the table for her after he passed away and she became the sole earner and provider for her family. And she couldn't afford childcare, she couldn't afford to stay in school, so she ended up creating a child childcare center in her home. And her center was so successful because in part of different policies we worked on, including the childcare block grants that went to the state. She ended up opening additional centers, I visited her at one of them in Colorado. Now she has a huge focus on helping teenage moms who don't have the resources to afford quality childcare for their kids come into her centers and programs. And it's stories like that of the hardships people face, but also what they do with opportunity when they're given it, that really powers you through tough moments when you're in Washington.

Lex Fridman

What can you say about the process of bringing that to life? So, the child tax credits, so doubling them from a \$1,000, \$2,000 per child, what are the challenges of that? Getting people to compromise? I'm sure there's a lot of politicians playing games with that because maybe it's a Republican that came up with an idea or a Democrat that came up with an idea, and so they don't want to give credit to the idea. And there's probably all kinds of games happening where when the game is happening, you probably forget about the families. Each politician thinks about how they can benefit themselves, if you get the serving part of the role you're supposed to be in.

Ivanka Trump

There were definitely people I met with in Washington who I felt that was true of. But they all go back to their districts and I assume that they all have similar experiences to what I had, where people share their stories. So there'd be something really cynical about thinking they forget, but some do.

Lex Fridman

You helped get people together. What's that take? Trying to get people to compromise, trying to get people to see the common humanity?

Ivanka Trump

Well, I think first and foremost, you have to be willing to talk with them. So, one of the policies I advocated for was paid family leave. We left, and nine million more Americans had it through a combination of securing it for our federal workforce. I had people in the White House who were pregnant who didn't have access to paid leave. So, we want to keep people attached to the workforce, yet when they have an important life event like a child, we create an impossibility for that. Some people don't even have access to unpaid leave if they're part-time workers. And so that, and then we also put in place the first ever national tax credit for workers making under \$72,000 a year where employers could then offer it to their workers. That was also part of tax cuts. So part of it is really taking the arguments as to why this is good, smart, well-designed policy to people. And it was one of my big surprises that

on certain policy issues that I thought would have been well socialized, the policies that existed were never shared across the aisle. So people just lived with them maybe in hopes that one day - so people just lived with them maybe in hopes that one day they would have the votes to get exactly what they want. But I was surprised by how little discussion there was. So I think part of it is be willing to have those tough discussions with people who may not share your viewpoint and be an active listener when they point out flaws and they have suggestions for changes, not believing that you have a monopoly on good ideas. And I think there has to be a lot of humility in architecting these things. And a policy should benefit from that type of well-rounded input.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Be able to see, like you said, well-designed policies. There's probably the details are important too. Just like with architecture and you walk the rooms, there's probably really good designs of policies, economic policy that helps families that delivers the maximum amount of money or resources to families that need it and is not a waste of money. So there's probably really nice designs there and nice ideas that are bipartisan that has nothing to do with politics, has to do with just great economic policy, just great policies. And that requires listening.

Ivanka Trump

Requires trust, too.

Lex Fridman

Trust.

Ivanka Trump

I learned tax cuts was really interesting for me because I met with so many people across the political spectrum on advancing that policy. I really figured out who was willing to deviate from their talking points when the door was closed and who wasn't. And it takes some courage to do that, especially without surety that it would actually get done, especially if they've campaigned on something that was slightly different. And not everyone has that courage. So through tax cuts, I learned the people who did have that courage and I went back to that, well time and time again on policies that I thought were important, some were bipartisan. The Great American Outdoors Act is something, it's incredible policy.

Lex Fridman

I love that one.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah, it's amazing. It's one of the largest pieces of conservation legislation since the National Park system was created. And over 300 million people visit our national parks, the vast majority of them being Americans every year. So this is something that is real and

beneficial for people's lives, getting rid of the deferred maintenance, permanently funding them. But there are other issues like that that just weren't being prioritized. Modernizing Perkins CTE in vocational education. And it's something I became super passionate about and help lead the charge on. I think in America for a really long period of time, we've really believed that education stops when you leave high school or college. And that is not true and that's a dangerous way to think. So how can we both galvanize the private sector to ensure that they continue to train workers for the jobs they know are coming and how they train their existing workforce into the new jobs with robotics or machinery or new technologies that are coming down the pike. So galvanizing the private sector to join us in that effort. So whether it's the legislative side, like the actual legislation of Perkins CTE, which was focused on vocational education or whether it's the ability to use the White House to galvanize the private sector, we got over 16 million commitments from the private sector to retrain or re-skill workers into the jobs of tomorrow.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, there's so many aspects of education that you helped on, access to STEM and computer science education. So the CTE thing, you're mentioning modernizing career and technical education. And that's millions, millions of people. The act provided nearly \$1.3 billion annually to more than 13 million students to better align the employer needs and all that kind of stuff. Very large scale policies that help a lot of people. It's fascinating.

Ivanka Trump

Education often isn't like the bright shiny object everyone's running towards. So one of the hard things in politics, when there's something that is good policy, sometimes it has no momentum because it doesn't have a cheerleader. So where are areas of good policy that you can literally just carry across the finish line? Because people tend to run towards what's the news of the day to try to address whatever issue is being talked about on the front pages of papers. And there's so many issues that need to be addressed, and education is one of them that's just under-prioritized. Human trafficking. That's an issue that I didn't go to the White House thinking I would work on, but you hear a story of a survivor and you can't not want to eradicate one of the greatest evils that the mind can even imagine. The trafficking of people, the exploitation of children. And I think for so many they assume that this is a problem that doesn't happen on our shores. It's something that you may experience at far-flung destinations across the world, but it's happening there and it's happening here as well. And so through a coalition of people that on both sides of the aisle that I came to trust and to work well with, we were able to get legislation which the president signed, passed nine pieces of legislation, combating trafficking at home and abroad and digital exploitation of children.

Lex Fridman

How much of a toll does that take seeing all the problems in the world at such a large scale, the immensity of it all? Was that hard to walk around with that just knowing how much

suffering there is in the world? As you're trying to help all of it, as you're trying to design government policies to help all of that, it's also a very visceral recognition that there is suffering in the world. How difficult is that to walk around with?

Ivanka Trump

You feel it intensely. We were just talking about human trafficking. I mean you don't design these policies in the absence of the input of survivors themselves. You hear their stories. I remember a woman who was really influential in my thinking, Andrea Hipwell who she was in college where she was lured out by a guy she thought was a good guy, started dating him. He gets her hooked on drugs, convinces her to drop out of college and spends the next five years selling her. She only got out when she was arrested. And all too often that's happening too, that the victim's being targeted, not the perpetrator. So we did a lot with DOJ around changing that, but now she's helping other survivors get skills and job training and the therapeutic interventions they need. But you speak with people like Andrea and so many others, and I mean you can't not, your heart gets seized by it and it's both, it's motivating and it's hard. It's really hard.

Lex Fridman

I was just talking to a brain surgeon. Many of the surgeries he to do, he knows the chances are very low of success and he says that that wears his armor. It chips away. It's like only so many times can you do that.

Ivanka Trump

And thank God he is doing it because I bet you there are a lot of others that don't choose that particular field because of those low success rates.

Lex Fridman

But you could see the pain in his eyes, maintaining your humanity while doing all of it. You could see the story, you could see the family that loves that person. You feel the immensity of that, and you feel the heartbreak involved with mortality in that case and with suffering also in that case, and in general in all these in human trafficking. But even helping families try to stay afloat, trying to break out or escape poverty, all of that, you get to see those stories of struggle. It's not easy. But the people that really feel the humanity of that, feel the pain of that are probably the right people to be politicians. But it's probably also why you can't stay in there too long.

Ivanka Trump

It's the only time in my life where you actually feel like there's always a conflict, between work and life and making sure, as a woman, I'd often get asked about how do you balance work and family? And I never liked that question because balance, it's elusive. You're one fever away from no balance. Your child's sick one day. What do you do? There goes balance. Or you have a huge project with a deadline. There goes balance. I think a better way to frame

it is, am I living in accordance with my priorities? Maybe not every day, but every week, every month. And reflecting on have you architected a life that aligns with your priorities so that more often than not you're where you need to be in that moment. And service at that level was the one time where you really you feel incredibly conflicted about having any priorities other than serving. It's finite. In every business I've built, you're building for duration. And then you go into the White House and it is sand through an hourglass. Whether it's four years or eight years, it's a finite period of time you have. And most people don't last four years. I think the average in the White House is 18 months. It's exhausting. But it's the only time when you're at home with your own children that you feel, you think about all the people you've met and you feel guilty about any time that's spent not advancing those interests to the best of your capacity. And that's a hard thing. That's a really hard feeling as a parent. And it's really challenging then to be present, to always need to answer your phone, to always need to be available. It's very difficult, it's taxing, but it's also the greatest privilege in the world.

Lex Fridman

So through that, the turmoil of that, the hardship of that, what was the role of family through all of that, Jared and the kids? What was that like?

Ivanka Trump

That was everything. To have that, to have the support systems I had in place with my husband and we had left New York and wound up in Washington. And New York, I lived 10 blocks away from my mother-in-law who if I wasn't taking my kids to school, she was. So we lost some of that, which was very hard. But we had what mattered, which was each other. And my kids were young. When I got to Washington, Theo, my youngest was eight months old, and Arabella, my oldest, my daughter was five years old. So they were still quite young. We have a son, Joseph, who's three. And I think for me, the dose of levity coming home at night and having them there and just joyful and it was super grounding and important for me. I still remember Theo when he was around three, three and a half years old. Jared used to make me coffee every morning and it was like my great luxury that I would sit there. He still makes it for me every morning. I told him, I'm never, even though I secretly know how to actually work the coffee machine, but I've convinced him that I have no idea how to work the coffee machine. Now I'm going to be busted, but it's a skill I don't want to learn because it's one of his acts of love. He brings me coffee every morning in bed while I read the newspapers. And Theo would watch this. And so he got Jared to teach him how to make coffee. And Theo learned how to make a full-blown cappuccino.

Lex Fridman

Nice.

Ivanka Trump

And he had so much joy and every morning bringing me this cappuccino, and I remember the sound of his little steps, like the slide. It was so cute coming down the hallway with my perfectly foamed cappuccino. Now I try to get him to make me coffee and he's like, "Come on mom." It was a moment in time, but we had a lot of little moments like that that were just amazing.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I got a chance to chat with him and he has ... his silliness and sense of humor, yeah, it's really joyful. I could see how that could be an escape from the madness of Washington, of the adult life, the "adult life".

Ivanka Trump

And they were young enough. We really kept our home life pretty sheltered from everything else. And we were able to do so because they were so young and because they weren't connected to the internet. They were too young for smartphones, all of these things. We were able to shelter and protect them and allow them to have as normal as upbringing as was possible in the context we were living. And they brought me and continue to bring me so much, so much joy. But they were, I mean, without Jared and without the kids, it would've been much more lonely.

Lex Fridman

So three kids. You've now upgraded, two dogs and a hamster.

Ivanka Trump

Well, our second dog, we rescued him thinking, we thought he was probably part German Shepherd, part lab is what we were told. He's now, I don't even know if he qualifies as a dog. He's like the size of a horse, a small horse.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, basically a horse, yeah.

Ivanka Trump

Simba. So I don't think he has much lab in him. I think Joseph has not wanted to do a DNA test because he really wanted a German Shepherd. So he's a German Shepherd.

Lex Fridman

He's gigantic.

Ivanka Trump

He's gigantic. And we also have a hamster who's the newest addition because my son, Theo, he tried to get a dog as well. Our first dog Winter became my daughter's dog as she wouldn't

let her brothers play with him or sleep with him and was old enough to bully them into submission. So then Joseph wanted a dog and got Simba. Theo now wants the dog and has Buster the hamster in the interim. So we'll see.

Lex Fridman

What advice would you give to other mothers just planning on having kids and maybe advice to yourself on how to continue figuring out this puzzle?

Ivanka Trump

I think being a parent, you have to cultivate within yourself, like hide in levels of empathy. You have to really look at each child and see them for who they are, what they enjoy, what they love, and meet them where they're at. I think that can be enormously challenging when your kids are so different in temperament. As they get older, that difference in temperament may be within the same child, depending on the moment of the day, but it really, I think it's actually made me a much softer person, a much better listener. I think I see people more truly for who they are as opposed to how I want them to be sometimes. And I think being a parent to three children who are all exceptional and all incredibly different has enabled that in me. I think for me though, they've also been some of my greatest teachers in that we were talking about the presence you felt when you were in the jungle and the connectivity you felt and sort of the simple joy. And I think for us as we grow older, we kind of disconnect from that. My kids have taught me how to play again. And that's beautiful. I remember just a couple of weeks ago we had one of these crazy Miami torrential downpours and Arabella comes down, it's around eight o'clock at night, it's really raining. And she's got rain boots and pajama pants on, and she's going to take the dogs for a walk in the rain, which she had all day to walk, but she wasn't doing it because they needed to go for a walk. She was like, "This would be fun." And I'm standing at the doorstep watching her and she goes out with Simba and Winter, this massive dog and this little tiny dog. And I'm watching her walk to the end of the driveway and she's just dancing. And it's pouring. And I took off my shoes and I went out and I joined her and we danced in the rain. And even as a preteen who normally she allowed me to experience the joy with her, and it was amazing. We can be so much more fun if we allow ourselves to be more playful. We can be so much more present. I look at, Theo loves games, so we play a whole lot of board games, any kind of game. So it started with board games. We do a lot of puzzles. Then it became card games. I just taught him how to play poker.

Lex Fridman

Nice.

Ivanka Trump

He loves backgammon, like any kind of game. And he's so fully in them. When he plays, he plays. My son Joseph, he loves nature. And he'll say to me sometimes when I'm taking a picture of something he's observing like a beautiful sunset. He's like, "Mom, just experience

it." I'm like, "Yes, you're right Joseph, just experience it." So those kids have taught me so much about sort of reconnecting with what's real and what's true and being present in the moment and experiencing joy.

Lex Fridman

They always give you permission to sort of reignite the inner child to be a kid again. Yeah. And it's interesting what you said that the puzzle of noticing each human being, what makes them beautiful, the unique characteristics, what they're good at, the way they want to be mentored. I often see that, especially with coaches and athletes, young athletes aspiring to be great. Each athlete needs to be trained in a different way. For example, with some, you need a softer approach. With me, I always like a dictatorial approach. I like the coach to be this menacing figure. That's what brought out the best in me. I didn't want to be friends with the coach. I wanted almost, it's weird to say, but yelled at to be pushed. But that doesn't work for everybody. And that's a risk you have to take in the coach context of, because you can't just yell at everybody. You have to figure out what does each person need. And when you have kids, I imagine the puzzle is even harder.

Ivanka Trump

And when they all need different things, but yet coexist and are sometimes competitive with one another. So you'll be at a dinner table. The amount of times I get, "Well, that's not fair. Why did you let?" And I'm like, "Life isn't fair. And by the way, I'm not here to be fair." I'm like, "I'm trying to give you each what you need." Especially when I've been working really hard and in the White House, I'd say, "Okay, well now we have a Sunday and we have these hours," and I'll have a grand plan and we're going to make a count and it's going to involve hot chocolate and sleds, whatever it is that my great adventure that we're going to go play mini golf. And then I come down all psyched up, all ready to go, and the kids have zero interest. And there have been a lot of times where I've been like, "We're doing this thing." And then I realized, "Wait a second." Sometimes you just plop down on the floor and start playing magnet tiles and that's where they need you. So those of us who have sort of alpha personalities who sometimes it's just witness, witness what they need. Play with them and allow them to lead the play. Don't force them down a road you may think is more interesting or productive or educational or edifying. Just be with them, observe them, and then show them that you are genuinely curious about the things that they are genuinely curious about. I think there's a lot of love when you do that.

Lex Fridman

Also, there's just fascinating puzzles. I was talking to a friend yesterday and she has four kids and they fight a lot and she generally wants to break up the fights, but she's like, "I'm not sure if I'm just supposed to let them fight. Can they figure it out?" But you always break them up because I'm told that it's okay for them to fight. Kids do that. They kind of figure out their own situation. That's part of the growing up process. But you want to always, especially if it's physical, they're pushing each other. You want to kind of stop it. But at the same time,

it's also part of the play, part of the dynamics. And that's a puzzle you also have to figure out. And plus, you're probably worried that they're going to get hurt if they're ...

Ivanka Trump

Well, I think there's like when it gets physical that's like, "Okay, we have to intervene." I know you're into martial arts, but that's normally the red line, once it tips into that. But there is always that, you have to allow them to problem solve for themselves. A little interpersonal conflict is good. It's really hard when you try to navigate something because everyone thinks you're taking their sides. You have oftentimes incomplete information. I think for parents, what tends to happen too is we see our kids fighting with each other in a way that all kids do and we start to project into the future and catastrophize. If my two sons are going through a moment where they're like oil and water, anything one wants to do the other doesn't want to do. It's a very interesting moment. So my instinct is they're not going to like each other when they're 25. You sort of project into the future as opposed to recognizing this is a stage that I too went through, and it's normal, and it's not building it in your mind into something that's unnecessarily consequential.

Lex Fridman

It's short-term formative conflict.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

So ever since 2016, the number and the level of attacks you've been under has been steadily increasing, has been super intense. How do you walk through the fire of that? You've been very stoic about the whole thing. I don't think I've ever seen you respond to an attack. You just let it pass over you. You stay positive and you focus on solving problems and you didn't engage. While being in DC you didn't engage into the back and forth fire of the politics. So what's your philosophy behind that?

Ivanka Trump

I appreciate you're saying that I was very stoic about it. I think I feel things pretty deeply. So initially some of that really took me off guard, like some of the derivative love and hatred, some of the intensity of the attacks. And there were times when it was so easy to counter it. I'd even write something out and say, "Well, I'm going to press send," and never did. I felt that sort of getting into the mud, fighting back, it didn't run true to who I am as a human being. It felt at odds with who I am and how I want to spend my time. So I think as a result, I was oftentimes on the receiving end of a lot of cheap shots. And I'm okay with that because it's sort of the way I know how to be in the world. I was focused on things I thought mattered more. And I think part of me also internalized, there's a concept in Judaism called Lashon hara, which is translated into I think quite literally evil speech. And the idea that speaking

poorly of another is almost the moral equivalent to murder because you can't really repair it. You can apologize, but you can't repair it. Another component of that is that it does as much damage to the person saying the words than it does to the person receiving them. And I think about that a lot. I talk about this concept with my kids a lot, and I'm not willing to pay the price of that fleeting and momentary satisfaction of sort of swinging back because I think it would be too expensive for my soul. And that's how I made peace with it, because I think that feels more true for me. But it is a little bit contrary in politics. It's definitely a contrarian viewpoint to not get into the fray. Actually, some day, I love Dolly Parton says that she doesn't condemn or criticize. She loves and accepts. And I like that. It feels right for me.

Lex Fridman

I also like that you said that words have power. Sometimes people say, "Well, words, when you speak negatively of others, ah, that's just words." But I think there's a cost to that. There's a cost, like you said, to your soul, and there's a cost in terms of the damage it can do to the other person, whether it's to their reputation publicly or to them privately. It just as a human being psychologically. And in the place that it puts them because they they start thinking negatively in general and then maybe they respond and there's this vicious downward spiral that happens, that almost like we don't intend to, but it destroys everybody in the process. You quoted Alan Watts, I love him, in saying, "You're under no obligation to be the same person you were five minutes ago." So how have the years in DC and the years after changed you?

Ivanka Trump

I love Alan Watts too. I listen to his lecture sometimes falling asleep and on planes. He's got the most soothing voice. But I love what he said about you have no obligation to be who you were five minutes ago, because we should always feel that we have the ability to evolve and grow and better ourselves. I think further than that, if we don't look back on who we were a few years ago with some level of embarrassment, we're not growing enough. So there's nothing. When I look back, I'm like, oh, I feel like that feeling is because you're growing into hopefully sort of a better version of yourself. And I hope and feel that that's been true for me as well. I think the person I am today, we spoke in the beginning of our discussion about some of my earliest ambitions in real estate and in fashion, and those were amazing adventures and incredible experiences in government. And I feel today that all of those ambitions are more fully integrated into me as a human being. I'm much more comfortable with the various pieces of my personality and that any professional drive is more integrated into more simple pleasures. Everything for me has gotten much simpler and easier in terms of what I want to do and what I want to be. And I think that's where my kids have been my teachers just being fully present and enjoying the little moments. And it doesn't mean I'm any less driven than I was before. It's just more a part of me than being sort of the all-consuming energy one has in their 20s.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, just like you said, with your mom be able to let go and enjoy the water, the sun, the beach, and enjoy the moment, the simplicity of the moment.

Ivanka Trump

I think a lot about the fact that for a lot of young people, they really know what they want to do, but they don't actually know who they are. And then I think as you get older, hopefully you know who you are and you're much more comfortable with ambiguity around what you want to do and accomplish. You're more flexible in your thinking around those things.

Lex Fridman

And give yourself permission to be who you are.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

You made the decision not to engage in the politics of the 2024 campaign. If it's okay, let me read what you wrote on the topic. "I love my father very much. This time around I'm choosing to prioritize my young children and the private life we're creating as a family. I do not plan to be involved in politics. While I will always love and support my father going forward, I will do ... While I will always love and support my father, going forward, I will do so outside the political arena. I'm grateful to have had the honor of serving the American people, and I will always be proud of many of our Administration's accomplishments. So can you explain your thinking, your philosophy behind that decision?"

Ivanka Trump

I think first and foremost, it was a decision rooted in me being a parent, really thinking about what they need from me now. Politics is a rough, rough business and I think it's one that you also can't dabble in. I think you have to either be all in or all out. And I know today, the cost they would pay for me being all in, emotionally in terms of my absence at such a formative point in their life. And I'm not willing to make them bear that cost. I served for four years and feel so privileged to have done it, but as their mom, I think it's really important that I do what's right for them. And I think there are a lot of ways you can serve. Obviously, we talked about the enormity, the scale of what can be accomplished in government service, but I think there's something equally valuable about helping within your own community. And I volunteer with the kids a lot and we feel really good about that service. It's different, but it's no less meaningful. So I think there are other ways to serve. I also think for politics, it's a pretty dark world. There's a lot of darkness, a lot of negativity, and it's just really at odds with what feels good for me as a human being. And it's a really rough business. So for me and my family, it feels right to not participate.

Lex Fridman

So it wears on your soul, and yeah, there is a bit, at least from an outsider's perspective, a bit of darkness in that part of our world. I wish it didn't have to be this way.

Ivanka Trump

Me too.

Lex Fridman

I think part of that darkness is just watching all the legal turmoil that's going on. What's it like for you to see that your father involved in that, going through that?

Ivanka Trump

On a human level, it's my father and I love him very much, so it's painful to experience, but ultimately, I wish it didn't have to be this way.

Lex Fridman

I like it that underneath all of this, I love my father is the thing that you lead with. That's so true. It is family. And I hope amidst all this turmoil, love is the thing that wins.

Ivanka Trump

It usually does.

Lex Fridman

In the end, yes. But in the short-term, there is, like we were talking about, there's a bit of bickering. But at least no more duels.

Ivanka Trump

No more duels.

Lex Fridman

You mentioned Dolly Parton.

Ivanka Trump

That's a segue.

Lex Fridman

Listen, I'm not very good at this thing. I'm trying to figure it out. Okay, we both love Dolly Parton. So you're big into live music. So maybe you can mention why you love Dolly Parton. I definitely would love to interview her. She's such an icon.

Ivanka Trump

Oh, I hope you can.

Lex Fridman

She's such an incredible human.

Ivanka Trump

What I love about her, and I've really come to love her in recent years is she's so authentically herself and she's obviously so talented and so accomplished and this extraordinary woman, but I just feel like she has no conflict within herself as to who she is. She reminds me a lot of my mom in that way, and it's super refreshing and really beautiful to observe somebody who's so in the public eye being so fully secure in who they are, what their talent is, and what drives them. So I think she's amazing. And she leads with a lot of love and positivity. So I think she's very cool. I hope you have a long conversation with her.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. She's like... Okay. So there's many things to say about her. First, incredibly great musician, songwriters, performer. Also can create an image and have fun with it, have fun being herself, over the top.

Ivanka Trump

It feels that way, right? She's really, she enjoys. After all these years, it feels like she enjoys what she does. And you also have the sense that if she didn't, she wouldn't do it.

Lex Fridman

That's right. And just an iconic country musician. Country music singer.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

There's a lot. We've talked about a lot of musicians. Who do you enjoy? You mentioned Adele, seeing her perform, hanging out with her.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah, I mean, she's extraordinary. Her voice is unreal. So I find her to be so talented. And she's so unique in that three year olds love her music. She was actually the first concert Arabella ever went to at Madison Square Garden when she was around four. And 90-year-olds love her music. And that's pretty rare to have that kind of bandwidth of resonance. So I think she's so talented. We actually just saw her, I took all three kids in Las Vegas around a month ago. Alice Johnson, whose case I had worked with in the White House, my father commuted her sentence, her case was brought to me by a friend, Kim Kardashian, and she came to the show. We all went together with some mutual friends. And that was a very profound... It was amazing to see Adele, but it was a very profound experience for me to have with my kids because she rode with us in the car on the way to

the show, and she talked to my kids about her experience and her story and how her case found its way to me. And I think for young children, it's very abstract, policy. And so for her to be able to share with them this was a very beautiful moment and led to a lot of really incredible conversations with each of my kids about our time and service because they gave up a lot for me to do it. Actually, Alice told them the most beautiful story about the plays she used to put on in prison, how these shows were the hottest ticket in town. You could not get into them, they always extended their run. But for the people who were in them, a lot of those men and women had never experienced applause. Nobody had ever shown up at their games or at their plays and clapped for them. And the emotional experience of just being able to give someone that, being able to stand and applaud for someone and how meaningful that was. And she was showing us pictures from these different productions and it was a beautiful moment. Alice actually, after her sentence was commuted and she came out of prison, together, we worked on 23 different pardons or commutations. So the impact of her experience and how she was able to take her opportunity and create that same opportunity for others who were deserving and who she believed in was very beautiful. So anyway, that was an extraordinary concert experience for my kids to be able to have that moment.

Lex Fridman

What a story. So that's the...

Ivanka Trump

Then here we are dancing at Adele.

Lex Fridman

Exactly, exactly. It's like that turning point.

Ivanka Trump

Six years later was almost to the day, six years later.

Lex Fridman

So that policy, that meeting of the minds resulted in a major turning point in her life and Alice's life. And now you're even dancing with Adele.

Ivanka Trump

And now we're at Adele.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. I mean, you mentioned also there, I've seen commutations where it's an opportunity to step in and consider the ways that the justice system does not always work well like in cases when it's nonviolent crime and drug offenses, there's a case of a person you mentioned that received a life sentence for selling weed. And it's just the number... It's like hundreds of

thousands of people are in the federal prison, in jail, in the system for selling drugs. That's the only thing. With no violence on their record whatsoever. Obviously, there's a lot of complexity. There's the details matter, but oftentimes, the justice system does not do right in the way we think right is, and it's nice to be able to step in and help people indirectly.

Ivanka Trump

They're overlooked and they have no advocate. Jared and I helped in a small way on his effort, but he really spearheaded the effort on criminal justice reform through the First Step Act, which was an enormously consequential piece of legislation that gave so many people another opportunity, and that was amazing. So working with him closely on that was a beautiful thing for us to also experience together. But in the final days of the administration, you're not getting legislation passed and anything you do administratively is going to be probably overturned by an incoming administration. So how do you use that time for maximum results? And I really dug in on pardons and commutations that I thought were overdue and were worthy. And my last night in Washington, D.C., the gentleman you mentioned, Corvin, I was on the phone with his mother at 12:30 in the morning, telling her that her son would be getting out the next day. And it felt really... It's one person. But you see with Alice, the ripple effect of the commutation granted to her and her ability and the impact she'll have within her family, with her grandkids. And now, she's an advocate for so many others who are voiceless. It felt like the perfect way to end four years, to be able to call those parents and call those kids in some cases and give them the news that a loved one was coming home.

Lex Fridman

And I just love the cool image of you, Kim Kardashian, and Alice just dancing on Adele's show with the kids. I love it.

Ivanka Trump

Well, Kim wasn't at the Adele show, but-

Lex Fridman

Oh, she's the... Got it.

Ivanka Trump

She had connected us. It was beautiful. It was really beautiful.

Lex Fridman

The way Adele can hold just the badassness she has on stage, she does heartbreak songs better than anyone. Or no, it's not even heartbreak. What's that genre of song, like Rolling in the Deep, like a little anger, a little love, a little something, a little attitude, and just one of the greatest voices ever. All that together just her by herself.

Ivanka Trump

Yeah, you can strip it down and the power of her voice. I think about that. One of the things we were talking about live music, one of the amazing things now is there's so much incredible concert material that's been uploaded to YouTube. So sometimes I just sit there and watch these old shows. We both love Stevie Ray Vaughan, like watching him perform. You can even find old videos of Django Reinhardt.

Lex Fridman

You got me.

Ivanka Trump

I got you -

Lex Fridman

Stevie Ray Vaughan.

Ivanka Trump

... Texas Flood.

Lex Fridman

We had this moment, which is hilarious that you said one of the songs you really like of Stevie's is Texas Flood.

Ivanka Trump

Well, my bucket list is to learn how to play it.

Lex Fridman

It's a bucket list. This is a bucket list item. You made me feel so good because for me, Texas Flood was the first solo on guitar I've ever learned because for me, it was the impossible solo. And then so I worked really hard to learn it. It's like one of the most iconic sort of blues songs, Texas blues songs. And now, you made me fall in love with the song again and want to play it out live, at the very least, put it up on YouTube because it's so fun to improvise. And when you lose yourself in the song, it truly is a blues song. You can have fun with it.

Ivanka Trump

I hope you do do that.

Lex Fridman

Throw on a Stevie Ray Vaughan-

Ivanka Trump

Regardless, I want you to play it for me.

Lex Fridman

100%. 100%.

Ivanka Trump

But he's amazing. And there's so many great performers that are playing live now. I just saw Chris Stapleton's show. He's an amazing country artist.

Lex Fridman

He's too good.

Ivanka Trump

He's so good.

Lex Fridman

That guy is so good.

Ivanka Trump

Lukas Nelson's -

Lex Fridman

Lukas Nelson's amazing.

Ivanka Trump

- one of my favorites to see live. And there's so many incredible songwriters and musicians that are out there touring today, but I think you also, you can go online and watch some of these old performances. Like Django Reinhardt was the first, because I torture myself, was the first song I learned to play on the guitar and it took me nine months to a year. I mean, I should have chosen a different song, but *Où es-tu mon amour?*, one of his songs, was... And it was like finger style and I was just going through and grinding it out. And that's kind of how I started to learn to play, by playing that song. But to see these old videos of him playing without all his fingers and the skill and the dexterity, one of my favorite live performances is actually who really influenced Adele is Aretha Franklin. And she did a version of *Amazing Grace*. Have you ever seen this video?

Lex Fridman

No.

Ivanka Trump

I cry. Look up... It was in L.A. It was like the Temple Missionary Baptist Church. Talk about stripped down. She's literally a... I mean, just listen to this.

Lex Fridman

Well, you could do one note and you could just kill it. The pain, the soulfulness.

Ivanka Trump

The spirit you feel in her when you watch this.

Lex Fridman

That's true. Adele carries some of that spirit also. Right?

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. And you can take away all the instruments with Adele and just have that voice and it's so commanding and it's so... Anyway, you watch this and you see the arc of also the experience of the people in the choir and them starting to join in. And anyway, it's amazing.

Lex Fridman

I love watching Queen, like Freddie Mercury, Queen performances in terms of vocalists and just great stage presence.

Ivanka Trump

That Live Aid performance is considered one of the best of all, I think.

Lex Fridman

I've watched that so many times. He's so cool.

Ivanka Trump

Can we pull up that for a second? Go to that part where he's singing Radio Ga Ga and they're all mimicking in his arm movements. It's so cool. Radio ga ga. All we hear is.

Lex Fridman

Look at that. Radio ga ga. Oh, man. I miss that guy.

Ivanka Trump

So good.

Lex Fridman

So that's an example of a person that was born to be on stage.

Ivanka Trump

So good. Well, we were talking surfing, we were talking jiu-jitsu. I think live music is one of those kind of rare moments where you can really be present, where something about the anticipation of choosing what show you're going to go to and then waiting for the date to

come. And normally, it happens in the context of community. You go with friends and then allowing yourself to sort of fall into it is incredible.

Lex Fridman

So you've been training jiu-jitsu.

Ivanka Trump

Yes. Trying.

Lex Fridman

I mean, I've seen you do jiu-jitsu. You're very athletic. You know how to use your body to commit violence. Maybe there's better ways of phrasing that, but anyway -

Ivanka Trump

It's been a skill that's been honed over time.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. I mean, what do you like about jiu-jitsu?

Ivanka Trump

Well, first of all, I love the way I came to it. It was my daughter. I think I told you this story. At 11, she told me that she wanted to learn self-defense, and she wanted to learn how to protect herself, which I just, as a mom, I was so proud about because at 11, I was not thinking about defending myself. I loved that she had sort of that desire and awareness. So I called some friends, actually a mutual friend of ours, and asked around for people who I could work with in Miami, and they recommended the Valente Brothers' studio. And you've met all three of them now. They're these remarkable human beings, and they've been so wonderful for our family. I mean, first, starting with Arabella, I used to take her and then she'd kind of encouraged me and she'd sort of pull me into it and I started doing it with her. And then Joseph and Theo saw us doing it, they wanted to start doing it. So now they joined and then Jared joined. So now, we're all doing jiu-jitsu.

Lex Fridman

Mm-hmm. That's great.

Ivanka Trump

And for me, there's something really empowering, knowing that I have some basic skills to defend myself. I think it's something, as humans, we've kind of gotten away from. When you look at any other animal and even the giraffe, they'll use their neck, the lion, the tiger, every species. And then there's us, who most of us don't. And I didn't know how to protect myself. And I think that it gives you a sense of confidence and also gives you kind of a sense of calm, knowing how to de-escalate rather than escalate a situation. I also think as part of the

training, you develop more natural awareness when you're out and about. And I feel like especially everyone's... You get on an elevator and the first thing people do is pick up their phone. You're walking down the street, people are getting hit by cars because they're walking into traffic. I think as you start to get this training, you become much more aware of the broader context of what's happening around you, which is really healthy and good as well. But it's been beautiful. Actually, the Valente Brothers, they have this 753code that was developed with some of the samurai principles in mind. And all of my kids have memorized it and they'll talk to me about it. Theo, he's eight years old, he's able to recite all 15. So benevolence and fitness and nutrition and flow and awareness and balance. And it's an unbelievable thing. And they'll actually integrate it into conversations where they'll talk about something that... Yeah, rectitude, courage.

Lex Fridman

Benevolence, respect, honesty, honor, loyalty. So this is not about jiu-jitsu techniques or fighting techniques. This is about a way of life, about the way you interact with the world with other people. Exercise, nutrition, rest, hygiene, positivity, that's more on the physical side of things. Awareness, balance, and flow.

Ivanka Trump

It's the mind, the body, the soul, effectively, is how they break it out. And the kids can only advance and get their stripes if they really internalize this, they give examples of each of them. And my own kids will come home from school and they'll tell me examples of how things happened that weren't aligned with the 753code. So it's a framework much like religion is in our house and can be for others. It's a framework to discuss things that happen in their life, large and small, and has been beautiful. So I do think that body-mind connection is super strong in jiu-jitsu.

Lex Fridman

So there's many things I love about the Valente Brothers, but one of them is the how rooted it is in philosophy and history of martial arts in general. A lot of places, you'll practice the sport of it, maybe the art of it, but to recognize the history and what it means to be a martial artist broadly on and off the mat, that's really great. And the other thing that's great is they also don't forget the self-defense root, the actual fighting roots. So it's not just a sport, it's a way to defend yourself on the street in all situations. And that gives you a confidence in, just like you said, an awareness about your own body and awareness about others. Sadly, we forget, but it's a world full of violence or the capacity for violence. So it's good to have an awareness of that and the confidence how to essentially avoid it.

Ivanka Trump

100%. I've seen it with all of my kids and myself, how much they've benefited from it. But that self-defense component and the philosophical elements of... Pedro will often tell them about wuwei and sort of soft resistance and some of these sort of more eastern

philosophies that they get exposed to through their practice there that are sort of non-resistance, that are beautiful and hard concepts to internalize as an adult, but especially when you're 12, 10, and 8 respectively. So it's been an amazing experience for us all.

Lex Fridman

I love people like Pedro because he's finding books that are in Japanese and translating them to try to figure out the details of a particular history. He's an ultra scholar of martial arts, and I love that. I love when people give everything, every part of themselves to the thing they're practicing. People have been fighting each other for a very long time. From the Colosseum on. You can't fake anything. You can't lie about anything. It's truly honest. You're there and you either win or lose. And it's simple. And it's also humbling, that the reality of that is humbling.

Ivanka Trump

And oftentimes in life, things are not that simple, not that black and white.

Lex Fridman

So it's nice to have that sometimes. That's the biggest thing I gained from jiu-jitsu, is getting my ass kicked, was the humbling. And it's nice to just get humbled in a very clear way. Sports in general are great for that. I think surfing probably because I can imagine just face planting, not being able to stay on the board. It's humbling. And the power of the wave is humbling. So just like your mom, you're an adventurer. Your bucket list is probably like 120 pages.

Ivanka Trump

It's a lot.

Lex Fridman

There are things that just popped to mind that you're thinking about, especially in the near future? Just anything.

Ivanka Trump

Well, I hope it always is long. I hope I've never exhausted exploring all the things I'm curious about. I always tell my kids whenever they say, "Mom, I'm bored.", "Only boring people get bored." There's too much to learn. There's too much to learn. So I've got a long one. I think, obviously, there are some immediate tactical, interesting things that I'm doing. I'm incubating a bunch of businesses, I'm investing in a bunch of companies that hopefully I'll always can continue to do that. Some of the fun things I'm doing in real estate now. So those are all on the list of things I'm passionate and excited about, continuing to explore and learn. But in terms of the ones that are more pure sort of adventure or hobby, I think I'd like to climb Mount Kilimanjaro. Actually, I know I would. And the only thing keeping me from doing

it in the short-term is I feel like it'd be such a great experience to do with my kids and I'd love to have that experience with them. I also told Arabella, we were talking about this archery competition that happens in Mongolia, and she loves horseback riding. So I'm like, I feel like that would be an amazing thing to experience together. I want to get barreled by a wave and learn how to play Texas Flood. I want to see the Northern Lights. I want to go and experience that. I feel like that would be really beautiful. I want to get my black belt.

Lex Fridman

Black belt? Nice.

Ivanka Trump

I asked you, "How long did it take?" So I want to get my black belt in jiu-jitsu. That's going to be a longer-term goal, but within the next decade. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Outer space?

Ivanka Trump

A lot of things. I'd love to go to space. Not just space. I think I'd love to go to the moon.

Lex Fridman

Like step on the moon?

Ivanka Trump

Yeah. Or float in close proximity, like that famous photo.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. With just you in a...

Ivanka Trump

The space suit. I feel like Mars is, [inaudible 03:00:18] at this point in my life... Well, the moon's like four days, feels more manageable.

Lex Fridman

I don't know. But the sunset on Mars is blue. It's the opposite color. I hear it's beautiful. It might be worth it. I don't know.

Ivanka Trump

You negotiate with Theo.

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Ivanka Trump

Let me know how it goes. Let me know how it goes.

Lex Fridman

I think actually, just even going to space where you can look back on Earth. I think that just to see this little –

Ivanka Trump

Pale blue dot?

Lex Fridman

... pale blue dot, just all the stuff that ever happened in human civilization is on that. And to be able to look at it and just be in awe, I don't think that's a thing that will go away.

Ivanka Trump

I think being interplanetary, my hope is that that heightens for us how rare it is what we have, how precious the Earth is. I hope that it has that effect because I think there's a big component to interplanetary travel that kind of taps into this kind of manifest destiny inclination, like the human desire to conquer territory and expand the footprint of civilization. That sometimes feels much more rooted in dominance and conquest than curiosity, wonder. And obviously, I think there's maybe an existential imperative for it at some point, or a strategic and security one. But I hope that what feels inevitable at this moment, I mean, you know Elon Musk and what he's doing with SpaceX and Jeff Bezos and others, it feels like it's not an if, it's a when at this point. I hope it also underscores the need to protect what we have here.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. I hope it's the curiosity that drives that exploration. And I hope the exploration will give us a deeper appreciation of the thing we have back home, and that Earth will always be home and it's a home that we protect and celebrate. What gives you hope about the future of this thing we have going on? Human civilization, the whole thing.

Ivanka Trump

I think I feel a lot of hope when I'm in nature. I feel a lot of hope when I am experiencing people who are good and honest and pure and true and passionate, and that's not an uncommon experience. So those experiences give me hope.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, other humans. We're pretty cool.

Ivanka Trump

I love humanity. We're awesome. Not always, but we're a pretty good species.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, for the most part on the whole... We do all right. We do all right. We create some beautiful stuff, and I hope we keep creating and I hope you keep creating. You've already done a lot of amazing things, build a lot of amazing things, and I hope you keep building and creating and doing a lot of beautiful things in this world. Ivanka, thank you so much for talking today.

Ivanka Trump

Thank you, Lex.

Lex Fridman

Thanks for listening to this conversation with Ivanka Trump. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. Now, let me leave you with some words from Marcus Aurelius. Dwell on the beauty of life. Watch the stars and see yourself running with them. Thank you for listening. I hope to see you next time.