

**Lex Fridman Podcast #437 - Jordan Jonas: Survival, Hunting, Siberia, God, and
Winning Alone Season 6**

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Lex Fridman

The following is a conversation with Jordan Jonas, winner of Alone Season 6, a show where the task is to survive alone in the arctic wilderness longer than anyone else. He is widely considered to be one of, if not the greatest competitors on that show. He has a fascinating life story that took him from a farm in Idaho and hoboing on trains across America to traveling with tribes in Siberia. All that helped make him into a world-class explorer, survivor, hunter, wilderness guide, and most importantly, a great human being with a big heart and a big smile. This was a truly fun and fascinating conversation. Let me also mention that at the end, after the episode, I'll start answering some questions and we'll try to articulate my thinking on some top-of-mind topics. So, if that's of interest to you, keep listening after the episode is over. This is The Lex Fridman Podcast. Support it. Please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, dear friends, here's Jordan Jonas. You won Alone Season 6, and I think are still considered to be one of, if not the most successful survivor on that show. So let's go back, let's look at the big picture. Can you tell me about the show Alone? How does it work?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. It's a show where they take 10 individuals and each person gets 10 items off of the list. Basic items would be an axe, a saw, a frying pan, some pretty basic stuff. And then, they send them all, drop them off all in the woods with a few cameras. And so, the people are actually alone. There's not a crew or anything, and then you basically live there as long as you can. And so, the person that lasts the longest, once the second place person taps out, they come and get you, and that individual wins. So, it's a pretty legit challenge. They drop you off, helicopter flies out, and you're not going to get your next meal until you make it happen. So...

Lex Fridman

You have to figure out the shelter, you have to figure out the source of food, and then it gets colder and colder because I guess they drop you out in a moment where it's going into the winter.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, they typically do it in temperate, colder climates, things like that. And they start in September, October, so time's ticking when they drop you off. And yeah, the pressure's on. You get overwhelmed with all the things you have to do right away. Like, oh man, I'm not going to eat again until I actually shoot or catch something. Got to build a shelter. It's pretty overwhelming. Figure your whole location out, but it's interesting, because once you're there, a little while, you get into a... Well, at least for me it did, there was a week, or maybe not a week, but that I was kind of a little more annoyed with things. It's like, "Oh, my site sucks," and then you kind of accept it. You know what it is, what it is. No code, no amount of complaining is going to do anybody any good, so I'm just going to make it happen or do my best to. And then I felt like I got in a zone and I felt like I was right back in Siberia or in that

head space. And I found, I actually really enjoyed it. I had been a little bit out of, I guess you call it the game, because I had had a child. And so, when we had our daughter, we came back to the States and then a bunch of things happened, and we didn't end up going back to Russia, so it'd been a couple of years that I was just, we were raising the little girl and boy then and then -

Lex Fridman

So you'd gotten a little soft.

Jordan Jonas

So I was like, "Did I got a little soft?"

Lex Fridman

Have to figure that out.

Jordan Jonas

But then it was fun after just some days there I was like, "Oh man, I feel like I'm at home now." And then, it was like you're kind of in that flow state, and it was -

Lex Fridman

Actually, there's a few moments when you left the ladder up or with the moose that you kind of screwed up a little bit.

Jordan Jonas

Oh, yeah.

Lex Fridman

How do you go from that moment of frustration to the moment of acceptance?

Jordan Jonas

I mean, the more you put yourself in life in positions that are kind of outside your comfort zone or push your abilities, the more often you're going to screw up, and then the more opportunity you have to learn from that. And then to be honest, it's kind of funny, but you almost get to a position where you don't feel that... It's not unexpected. You kind of expect you're going to mess up here and there. I remember particularly with the moose, the first moose I saw, I had a great shot at it, but I had a hard time judging distance because it was in a mud flat, which means it's hard to tell yardage because you usually typically go and by trees or markers and be like, "Oh, I'm probably 30 yards away." This was a giant moose and he was 40 something yards away, and I estimated that he was 30 something yards away. So I was way off and shot and dropped between his legs. And then I realized I had not grabbed my quiver, so I only had one shot, and I just watched him turn around and walk off. But I was struck initially with... I actually noticed how mad I was. I was like, "Oh, this is actually..." I was

like, "That was awesome though. It was seeing a dinosaur. That was really cool." And then I was like, "Oh, what an idiot. How'd I miss?" But it made me that much more determined to make it happen again. It was like, "Okay, nobody's going to make this happen except myself." You can't complain. It wouldn't have done me any good to go back and mope about it. And so then I was like, I had a thought. I was like, "Oh, I remember these native guys telling me they used to build these giant fences and funnel game into certain areas and stuff." And I was like, "Man, that's a lot of calories, but I have to make that happen again now." So I kind of went out there and tried that, and that was kind of an attempt at something to, it could have failed or not worked, but sure enough, it worked and the opportunity came again. The moose came wandering along and I was able to get it. But being able to take failure the sooner you can, the better. Accept it and then learn from it, it is kind of a muscle you have to exercise a little bit.

Lex Fridman

Well, it's interesting because in this case, the cost of failure is like you're not going to be able to eat.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, that was really interesting. I mean, the most interesting thing about that show was how high the stakes felt because it didn't feel... You didn't tell yourself you're on a show, at least I didn't. You just felt like you're going to starve to death if you don't make this happen. And so the stakes felt so high, and it was an interesting thing to tap into because, I mean, so many of our ancestors probably all just dealt with that on a regular basis, but it's something that with all the modern amenities and such, and food security that we don't deal with. And it was interesting to tap into what a kind of peak mental experience that is when you really, really need something to survive, and then it happens. You can't imagine, I mean, that's what all our dopamine and receptors are tuned for that experience in particular. So yeah, it was pretty awesome. But the pressure felt very on. I always felt the pressure of providing or starving.

Lex Fridman

And then there's the situation when you left the ladder up and you needed fat, and what is it? Wolverine need some of the fat.

Jordan Jonas

Right, yeah. Well, it was... When I got the moose, I was so happy. The most joy, I could almost experience, max, maxed out, but I didn't think I won at that point. I never thought like, "Oh, that's my ticket to victory." I thought, "Holy crap, it's going to be me against somebody else that gets a moose now, and we're going to be here six, eight months. Who knows how long? And so, I can't be here six, eight months and still lose. So I've got to outproduce somebody else with a moose." So I had all that in my head, and I already was of course pretty thin. And so, I was just like, "Man, if somebody else gets a moose, I'm still

going to be behind. "And so everything felt precious to me, and I had found a plastic jug, and I put a whole bunch of the moose's fat in this plastic jug and set it up on a little shelf. And I thought, "You know what? If a bear comes, I'll probably hear it and I'll come out and be able to shoot it." So I went to sleep and I woke up the next morning, I went out and I was like, "Where's that jug?" And then I was like, "Wait a second. What are all these prints?" And I started looking around and it took a second to dawn on me because I haven't interacted with wolverines very often in life. And I was like, "Oh, those are wolverine tracks." And he was just so much sneakier than a bear would've been or something. So it kind of surprised me, and he took off with that jug of fat. And so, then I went from feeling pretty good about myself to now I'm losing again against whoever this other person is with a moose. So again, kind of the pressure came back to, "Oh, no, I got to produce again." It wasn't the end of the world. And I think they may have exaggerated a little bit how little fat I had left. I still had... A moose has a lot of fat, but it did make me feel like I was at a disadvantage again. And so, yeah, that was pretty intense because those wolverines, they're bold little animals and he was basically saying, "No, this is my moose." And I had to counter his claims.

Lex Fridman

Well, yeah, they're really, really smart. They figure out a way to get to places really effectively. Wolverines are fascinating in that way. So, let's go to that happy moment, the moose. You are the first and one of the only contestants to have ever killed a moose on the show, a big game animal, with a bow and arrow. So this is day 20, so can you take me through the kill?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. So I had missed one, and I just decided I'm not here to starve, I'm here to try to become sustainable. So I was like, "I don't care if it's a risk, I'm going to build that fence." I built it. I would just pick berries and call moose every day. And it was actually really pleasant, just sit in a berry patch and call moose. But then I also had this whole trap and snare line set out everywhere. So I had all these... I was getting rabbits, and when I was actually taking a rabbit out of a snare when I heard a clank because I had set up kind of an alarm system with string and cans. So...

Lex Fridman

It's a brilliant idea.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Another thing that could have not worked, but it worked and it came through, and I was like, "Oh," I heard the cans clink. And I was like, "No way." And so I ran over, I didn't know what it was exactly, but something was coming along the fence. And I ran over and jumped in the bush next to the funneled exit on the fence. And sure enough, the big moose came running up and your heart gets pounding like crazy. You're just like, "No way. No way." I probably could have waited a little longer and had a perfect broadside shot, but I took the

shot when he was pretty close, like 24 yards, but he was quartering towards me, which makes it a little harder to make a perfect kill shot. And so, I hit it and it took off running, and I just thought, I was super excited. I couldn't believe I actually, I was like, "Oh my gosh, I got the moose. I think that was a really good shot." You get all excited, but then it plays back in your head. And particularly when you're first learning to hunt, there's always an animal that gets away and you make a bad decision or not a great shot or something, and it's just part of it. And so, of course you're like, "I'm not going to be satisfied until I see this thing." So I followed the blood trail a little while and I saw some bubbly blood, which meant it was hitting the lungs, which meant it's not going to live. You'll get it, as long as you don't mess it up. And so I went back to my shelter and waited an hour. I skinned that rabbit that had caught and then super nervous the slowest hour ever, ever. And then I followed it along, ended up losing the blood trail. I was like, "No, no." And then I was like, "Well, if there's no blood, I'm just going to follow the path that I would go if I was a moose, the least resistance through the woods." So I followed kind of along the shore there, and sure enough, I saw him up there and I was like, "Oh, I was so excited." He laid down, but he hadn't died yet. And so, he just sat there and he would stand up and I would just like, "No, no, no, no." And he would lay back down, I'd be like, "Yes." And then he would stand up, and it was like that for a couple hours it took him. And then finally at one point, and a lot of people have asked, "Why wouldn't you go finish it off?" So, when an animal like that gets hit, it had no idea what hit it. Just all of a sudden it's like, "Ah," something got it, it ran off and it lays down and it's actually fairly calm and it doesn't really know what's going on. And if you can leave it in that state, it'll kind of just bleed out and as peacefully as possible. If you go chase after it, that's when you lose an animal because as soon as it knows it's being hunted, it gets panicked, adrenaline, and it can just run and run and run, and you'll never find it. So I didn't want it to see me. I knew if I tried to get it with another arrow, there's a chance I could have finished it off, but there's also a not bad chance that it would see me, take off, or even attack, because moose can be a little dangerous. And so, I just chose to wait it out, and at one point it stood up and fell over and I could tell it had died. And walked over, you actually touch it and you're just like, "Whoa. No way." That whole burden of weeks of, "You're going to starve, you're going to starve." And it got rid of that demon. To be honest, it's one of the happiest moments of my life. It's really hard to replicate that joy because it was just so real, so directly connected to your needs. It's all so simple. It was a peak experience for sure.

Lex Fridman

And were you worried that it would take many more hours and it would take it into the night?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, I was. Until you actually have your hands on it, I was worried the whole time. It's a pretty nerve wracking period there between when you get it and when you actually recover the animal, get your hands on it. So, it took longer than I wanted, but I finally got it.

Lex Fridman

Can you actually speak to the kill shot itself, just for people who don't hunt? What it takes to stay calm, to not freak out too much, to wait, but not wait too long?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Yeah. I mean, another thing about hunting is that for every animal, you probably don't get nine or 10 that just turned the wrong way when you were drawn back or went away behind a tree or you never had a clean shot or whatever it is. And so, every time you can see a moment coming, your heart really starts beating and you have to breathe through it. I can almost feel the nervousness of it. And then, you just try to stay calm. Whatever you do, just try to stay calm, wait for it to come up, draw back. You've practiced shooting a lot, so you have kind of a technique. I am going to go back, touch my face, draw my elbow tight, and then the arrow's going to let loose.

Lex Fridman

So muscle memory, mostly.

Jordan Jonas

It's kind of muscle memory. You have a little trigger like, draw that elbow tight, and then it happens, and then you just watch the arrow and see where it goes. Now with the animal, you try to do it ethically. That is, make as good of a shot as you can, make sure it is either hit in the heart or both lungs. And when that happens, it's a pretty quick death, which is, death is a part of life, but honestly, for a wild animal, that's probably the best way to go they could have. Now, when an animal's kind of walking towards you, if it's walking towards you but not directly towards you, that's what you call quartering towards you. And you can picture, it's actually pretty difficult to hit both lungs because the shoulder blade and all that bone is in the way. So you have to make a perfect shot to get them both. And to be honest, when I took my shot, I was a couple inches or few inches, and so it went through the first lung and then it sunk the arrow all the way into the moose, but it allowed that second lung to stay breathing, which meant the moose stayed alive longer.

Lex Fridman

What's your relationship with the animal in the situation like that? You said death is a part of life.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, that's an interesting thought because no matter what your relationship to, however you choose to go through life, whatever you eat, whatever you do, death is a part of life. Every animal that's out there is living off of a dead, even plants, we're all part of this ecosystem. I think it's really easy in a, particularly in an urban environment, but anywhere to think that we're separate from the ecosystem, but we are very much a part of it, whether it be farming requires all this habitat to be turned into growing soybeans and da-da-da. And

when you get the plows and the combines, you're losing all kinds of different animals and all kind of potential habitat. So, it's not cost-free. And so when you realize that, then you want to produce the food and the things you need in an ethical manner. So, for me, hunting plays a really major role in that. I literally know how many animals year it takes to feed my family and myself. I actually know the exact number and I know what the cost of that is, and I'm aware of it because I'm out in the woods and I see these beautiful elk and moose, and I really love the species, love the animals, but there is a fact that one of those individuals is going to have to feed me. And particularly on Alone, it was very heightened, that experience. So I shot that one animal and I was so, so thankful that I wanted to give that big guy a hug and like, "Hey, sorry, it was you, but had to be somebody."

Lex Fridman

Yeah, there's that picture of you just almost hugging it.

Jordan Jonas

Right? Totally.

Lex Fridman

And you can also think about it, the calories, the protein, the fat, all of that, that comes from that, that will feed you.

Jordan Jonas

Right. You're so grateful for it. The gratitude is definitely there.

Lex Fridman

What about the bow and arrow perspective?

Jordan Jonas

Well, when you hunt with a bow, you just get so much more up close to the animals. You can't just get it from 600 yards away, you actually have to sneak in within 30 or so yards. And when you do that, the experiences you have are just, they're way more dragged out. So your heart's beating longer, you have to control your nerves longer. More often than not, it doesn't go your way and the thing gets away and you've been hiking around in the woods for a week and then your opportunity arises and floats away. No, but at the same time, that's the only time when you'll really have those interactions with the animals where you got this bugling bull tearing at the trees right in front of you and other cow and elk and animals running around. You end up having really, I don't know if I say intimate experiences with the animal, just because you're in it, you're kind of in its world, you're playing its game. It has its senses to defend itself, and you have your wit to try to get over those. And it really becomes, it's not easy. It becomes kind of that chess game. And, those prey animals are always tuned in. It's, slightest stick, they're looking for wolves or for whatever it is. So, there's something really pure and fun about it. I will say there's an aspect that is fun. There's no denying it. It's

like how people have been hunting forever. And I think it speaks to that part of us somehow. And I think bow hunting is probably the most pure form of it, and that you get those experiences more often than with a rifle. So, I don't know. I enjoy it a lot. And the way they do regulations and such kind of the best times to hunt are usually allowed for bow because they're trying to keep it fair for the animal and such. So...

Lex Fridman

So the distance, the close distance makes you more in touch with sort of the natural way of the predator and prey, and you just -

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, yeah.

Lex Fridman

You're one of the predators where you have to be clever, you have to be quiet, you have to be calm, you have to, all of that. And the full challenge and the luck involved in catching that. The same thing as the predators do.

Jordan Jonas

Exactly how many times do they snap a stick and watch them run off, and, "Darn, my stock was failed." So yeah, you're in that ecosystem.

Lex Fridman

How'd you learn to shoot the bow?

Jordan Jonas

So yeah, I didn't grow up hunting. I grew up in an area that a lot of people hunted, but my dad wasn't really into it. And so I never got into it until I lived in Russia with the natives. It was just such a part of everything we did and a part of our life that when I came back, I got a bow and I started doing archery in Virginia. It was a pretty easy way to hunt because the deer were overpopulated and you could get these urban archery permits. So you go out and every couple of days you'd have an opportunity to shoot a deer that they needed population control. And so, there were a lot of them, and it gave you a lot of opportunities to learn quickly. So that's what got me into it, and then I found I really enjoyed it.

Lex Fridman

Do you practice with the target also or just practice out?

Jordan Jonas

Oh, no, I would definitely practice with a target a lot. Again, you kind of have an obligation to do your best because you don't want to be flinging arrows into the leg of an animal. And it's a

cool way, honestly, to provide quality meat for the family. It's all raised naturally and wild and free until you bring it home into the freezer. So -

Lex Fridman

So if we step back, what are the 10 items you brought and what's actually the challenge of figuring out which items to bring?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. The challenge is that you don't exactly know what your site's opportunities are going to be. So, you don't really know, should I bring a fishing net? Am I going to even have a spot to net or not? And things like that. I brought an ax, a saw, a Leatherman wave, ferro rod is like, makes sparks to start a fire, a frying pan, a sleeping bag, a fishing kit, a bow and arrow, trapping wire, and paracord. And so, those are my 10 items.

Lex Fridman

Is there any regrets, any -

Jordan Jonas

No major regrets. I took the saw kind of, I thought it would be more of a calorie saver, then I didn't really need it. In hindsight, if I was doing season seven instead of six and got to watch, I would've taken the net because I just planned to make a net, but I would've rather just had two nets, brought one and left the saw. Because in the northern woods in particular, every tree is the size of your arm or leg. You can chop it down with an ax in a -

Lex Fridman

That's nice.

Jordan Jonas

... couple swings. Yeah, you don't really need the saw. And so, it was handy at times and useful, but I think it was my... If I had to do nine items, that would've been just fine without the saw.

Lex Fridman

So two nets would just expand your -

Jordan Jonas

Food gathering potentially.

Lex Fridman

And then, in terms of trapping, you were okay with just the little you brought?

Jordan Jonas

The snare wire was good. I ran some, I put out... I used all my snare wire. I ran trap line, which is just a series of traps through the woods and brush every place you see a sign, put a snare, put a little mark on the tree so I knew where that snare was and just make these paths through the woods. And I put out, I don't know how many, 150, 200 snares. So every day I'd get a rabbit or two out of them. And then, so I had a lot of rabbits, but once I got the moose, I actually took all those snares down because I didn't want to catch anything needlessly. And, you come to find out you can't live off of rabbits, man cannot live off rabbit alone it turns out.

Lex Fridman

So you set up a huge number of traps. You were also fishing and then always on the lookout for moose.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

So in terms of survival, if you were to do it over again, over and over and over and over, how do you maximize your chance of having enough food to survive for a long time?

Jordan Jonas

You have to be really adaptable because everything's going to, it's always going to look different, your situation, your location. I actually had what I thought was a pretty good plan going into Alone, and the location didn't allow for what I thought it would.

Lex Fridman

What was the plan?

Jordan Jonas

Well, I thought I would just catch a bunch of fish because I'm on a really good fishing lake. I catch a whole bunch of fish and let them rot for a little while and then just drag them all through the woods into a big pile and then hunt a bear on that big fish pile. That was the plan, and I thought... But when I got there for one, I had a hard time catching fish off the bat, they didn't come like I was hoping. And then for two, it had burned prior, so there were no berries. And so, there were very few berries, which meant there weren't grouse, there weren't bear. They had all gone to other places where the berries were. And so, what I had grown accustomed to relying on in Siberia wasn't there. So in Russia, which was a similar environment, it was just grouse and berries and fish, and grouse and berries and fish. And then occasionally, you get a moose or something. But I had to reassess, which was part of me being grumpy at the start like, "This place sucks." And then, once I reassessed, and right away, I saw that there were moose tracks and such. So I just started to plan for that. I

moved my camp into an area that was as removed as I could be from where all the action is, where the tracks were, so that I wasn't disturbing animal patterns. I made sure the wind, the predominant wind was blowing out my scent to sea or to the water. And then really, to be honest, if you want to actually survive somewhere is different than Alone, but you do have to be active and you're not going to live... You're not going to be sustainable by starving it out. You have to unlock the key that is sustainability. And I think there's a lot of areas that still have that potential, but you have to figure out what it is. It's usually going to be a combination of fishing, trapping, and then hunting. And then, once you have the fishing and trapping will get you until you have some success hunting. And then, that'll buy you three or four months of time to continue, and to keep hunting again. And you just have to roll off of that. But it depends on where you are, what opportunities are there.

Lex Fridman

Okay, so that's the process. Fishing and trapping until you're successful hunting. And then the successful hunt buys you some more time.

Jordan Jonas

Right, right.

Lex Fridman

You just go year round.

Jordan Jonas

And then you just go year round like that. And that's how people did it forever. The pressure, I noticed it with you got that moose and then you're happy for a week or so, and then you start to be like, "This is finite. I'm going to have to do this again." And you imagine if you had a family that was going to starve if you weren't successful this next time. And there's just always that pressure. It made me really appreciate what people had to deal with.

Lex Fridman

Well, in terms of being active, so you have to do stuff all day. So you get up -

Jordan Jonas

Get up.

Lex Fridman

... and planning like, "What am I going to..." In the midst of the frustration, you have to figure out what's the strategy, how do you put up all the traps? Is that a decision, like most people sit at their desk and have a calendar, whatever, are you figuring out?

Jordan Jonas

One thing about wilderness life in general is it's remarkably less scheduled than anything we deal with. Schedules are fairly unique to the modern context. You'd wake up and you have a confluence of things you want to do, things you need to do, things you should do, and you just kind of tackle them as you see fit as it flows in. And that's actually one of the things that people really, that I really appreciate about that lifestyle is it really is, you're kind of in that flow. And so, I'd wake up and be like, "Maybe I'll go fishing," and then I'd wander over and fish, and then I'd be like, "I'm going to go check the trap line," at every day, if I had five or 10 snares, you're constantly adding to your productive potential, but nothing's really scheduled. You're just kind of flying by the seat of your pants.

Lex Fridman

But then there's a lot of instinct that's already loaded.

Jordan Jonas

Oh, there's so much. Yeah,

Lex Fridman

There's just wisdom from all the times you've had to do it before that you're just actually operating a lot on instinct, like you said, where to place the shelter, how hard is that calculation, where to place the shelter?

Jordan Jonas

If you're dropped off and this is all new to you, of course, all those things are going to be things you have to really think through and plan. When you're thinking about a shelter, you have to think of, "Oh, here's a nice flat spot. That's a good place." But also, "Is there firewood nearby? And if I'm going to be here for months, is there enough firewood that I'm not going to be walking half a mile to get a dry piece of wood? Is the water nearby? Is it somewhat open but also protected from the elements?" Sometimes you get a beautiful spot. It is great on a calm day, and then the wind comes like. And so. There's all these factors even down to taking in what game is doing in the area also, and how that relates to where your shelter is.

Lex Fridman

You said you have to consider where the action will be, and you want to be away from the action, but close enough to it.

Jordan Jonas

To see it. Yeah, you want to be, yeah, right. And so, ideally, it depends. You're always going to make give and takes. And one thing with shelters and location selection and stuff, that's another thing. You just have to trust your ability to adapt in that situation because everybody has a particular... You got an idea of a shelter you're going to build, but then you get there and maybe there's a good cliff that you can incorporate, and then you just become

creative. And that's a really fun process, too, to just allow your creativity to try to flourish in it.

Lex Fridman

What kind of shelters are there?

Jordan Jonas

There's all kinds of philosophies and shelters, which is fun. It's fun to see people try different things. Mine was fairly basic for the simple reason that I had lived through winters in Siberia in a teepee. So I knew I didn't need anything too robust. As long as I had calories, I'd be warm. And I wasn't particularly worried about the cold, but you'll see. So I kept my shelter really pretty simple with the idea that I built a simple A-frame type shelter. And then, most of my energy is going to be focused on getting calories. And then, of course, there's always going to be downtime. And in that downtime, I can tweak, modify, improve my shelter. And that'll just be a constant process that by the time you're there a few months, you'll have all the kinks worked out. It'll be a really nice little setup. But you don't have to start with that necessarily because you got other needs you got to focus on. That said, you'll see a lot of people on Alone that really focus on building a log cabin because they want to be secure or incorporating whatever the earth has around, whether it be rocks or whether it be digging a hole. And we've seen some really cool shelters, and I'm not going to knock it. Everybody... It is all different strokes for different folks. But my particular idea was to keep it fairly simple, improve it with time, but spend most of my energy... The shelter, you really need to think about it can't be smoky because that'll be miserable, but it is nice to have a fire inside. So you need to have a fire inside that's not going to be dangerous, smoke-free, and then also airtight, because you're never going to have a warm shelter out there because you don't have seals and things like that, but as long as the air's not moving through it, you can have a warm enough shelter.

Lex Fridman

With a fire.

Jordan Jonas

With a fire and dry your socks and stuff.

Lex Fridman

How do you get the smoke out of the shelter?

Jordan Jonas

If you have good clay and mud and rock, you can build yourself a fireplace, which is surprisingly not that hard. You just -

Lex Fridman

Oh, really?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, it's a fun thing to do. It works well. Take a little hole, start stacking rocks around it, make sure there's opening and it actually works. So that's not as hard as you might think. For me, where I was, I kind of came up with it as I was there with my A-frame. I hadn't built an A-frame shelter like that before. And so, when I built it, and then I had put a bunch of tin cans in the ground so that air would get the fire, so it was fed by air, which helps create a draft. But, I realized in an A-frame, it really doesn't... The smoke doesn't go out very well. Even if you leave a hole at the top, it collects and billows back down. So then I cut some of my tarp and made this, and cut a hole in the... Cut some of my tarp and made this... and cut a hole in the A-frame, and then I made a hood vent that I could pull down and catch the smoke with. And so, while the fire was going, it would just billow out the hood vent. And then, when it was done burning and was just hot coals, I could close it, seal it up and keep the heat in. So, it actually worked pretty well.

Lex Fridman

So, start with something that works and then keep improving it?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, exactly.

Lex Fridman

I was wondering, the log cabin, it feels like that's a thing that takes a huge amount of work before it'll work?

Jordan Jonas

Right. The difference between a log cabin and a warm log cabin is like an immense amount of work and all the chinking and all the door sealing and the chimney has to be... Anyway, otherwise it's just going to be the same ambient temperature as outside. So, I don't think a loan is the proper context for a log cabin. I think log cabin is great in as a hunting cabin, if you're going to have something for years. But in a three, six-month scenario, I don't know that it's worth the calorie expenditure.

Lex Fridman

And it is a lot of calories. But that's an interesting metaphor of just get something that works. You see a lot of this with companies, like successful companies, they get a prototype, get a system that's working and improve fast in response to the conditions to environment.

Jordan Jonas

Because it's constantly changing.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. You end up being a lot better if you're able to learn how to respond quickly versus having a big plan that takes a huge amount of time to accomplish. That's interesting.

Jordan Jonas

Right. Forcing that through the pipeline, whether or not it fits.

Lex Fridman

Can you just speak to the place you were, the Canadian Arctic? It looked cold.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, we were right near the Arctic Circle. I don't know, it was like 60 kilometers south of the Arctic Circle. It's a really cool area, really remote. Thousands of little lakes. When you fly over, you're just like, "Man, that's incredible. There must be so many of those lakes that people haven't been to." It really was a neat area, really remote. And for the show's purpose, I think it was perfect because it did have enough game and enough different avenues forward that I think it really did reward activity. But it's a special place. It was Dene, there was a tribe that lived there, the Dene people, which interestingly enough, here's a side note. When I was in Siberia, I floated down this river called the Podkamennaya Tunguska, and you get to this village called Sulamai, and there's these Ket people they're called, and there's only 600 of them left. This is in the middle of Siberia, not unlike the Pacific coast, but their language is related to the Dene people. And so, somehow that connection was there thousands of years ago. Super interesting.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. So, language travels somehow.

Jordan Jonas

Right. And the remnants stayed back there. It's very interesting to think through history.

Lex Fridman

Within language, it contains a history of a people, and it's interesting how that evolves over time and how wars tell the story. Language tells the story of conflict and conflict shapes language, and we get the result of that.

Jordan Jonas

Right. So, fascinating.

Lex Fridman

And the barriers that language creates is also the thing that leads to wars and misunderstandings and all this kind of stuff. It's a fascinating tension. But it got cold there, right? It got real cold.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. I mean, I don't know. I didn't have a thermometer. I imagine it probably got to negative 30 at the most. I think it might have gotten... It would've definitely gotten colder had we stayed longer. But yeah, to be honest, I never felt cold out there. But I had that one pretty dialed in. And then, once you have calories, you can stay warm, you can stay active, you got to dress warm. There's a good one. If you're in the cold, never let yourself get too cold, because what happens is you'll stop feeling what's cold and then frostbite and then issues, and then it's really hard to warm back up. So, it was so annoying. I'd be out going to ice fish or something and then I would just notice that my feet are cold and you're just like, "Oh, dang it." I just turn around, go back, start a fire, dry my boots out, make sure my feet are warm, and then go again. I wouldn't ignore that.

Lex Fridman

Oh, so you want to be able to feel the cold?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, you want to make sure you're still feeling things and that you're not toughen through it. Because you can't really tough through the cold. It'll just get you.

Lex Fridman

What's your relationship with the cold, psychologically, physically?

Jordan Jonas

It's interesting. Actually, there's some part of it that really makes you feel alive. I imagine sometime in Austin here you go out and it's hot and sweaty and you're like, "Ugh." You get that kind of saps you. There's something about that brisk cold that hits your face that you're like, "Booo." It wakes you up. It makes you feel really alive, engaged. It feels like the margins of air are smaller, so you're alert and engaged a little more. There is something that's a little bit life-giving just because you feel on an edge, you're on this edge, but you have to be alert because even some of the natives I lived with, the lady had face issues because she let her head get cold, when they're on a snowmobile hat was up too high, that little mistake, and then it just freezes this part of your forehead and then the nerves go and then you got issues. One just hat wasn't high enough, so you got to be dialed in on stuff.

Lex Fridman

Well, there's a psychological element to just... I mean, it's unpleasant. If I were to think of what kind of unpleasant would I choose, fasting for long periods of time was going without food in a warm environment is way more pleasant than -

Jordan Jonas

Being fed in the cold?

Lex Fridman

Yeah, exactly. If you were to choose to -

Jordan Jonas

I'd choose the opposite.

Lex Fridman

Yeah. Okay. Well, there you go. I wonder if that's... I wonder if you're born with that or if that's developed maybe your time in Siberia or do you gravitate towards it? I wonder what that is because I really don't like survival in the cold.

Jordan Jonas

I think a little bit of it is learned. You almost learned not... you learn not to fear it. You learn to appreciate it. And a big part of that is to be honest, it's like dressing warm, being in good... it's not like, there's no secrets to that. You just can't beat the cold. So, you just need to dress warm, the native, all that fur, all that stuff, and then all of a sudden you have your little refuge, have a nice warm fire going in your teepee, and then I bet you could learn to appreciate it.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I think some of it is just opening yourself up to the possibility that there's something enjoyable about it. Here I run in Austin all the time in a hundred-degree heat. And I go out there with a smile on my face and learn to enjoy it.

Jordan Jonas

Oh yeah.

Lex Fridman

And so, you just like, I look like you do in the cold. I don't think I enjoy the heat, but you just allow yourself to enjoy it.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Yeah. I do feel that way. I mean, I don't mind the heat that much, but I think you could get to the place where you appreciated the cold. It's probably just a lack of -

Lex Fridman

Practice.

Jordan Jonas

It's scary when you haven't done it and you don't know what you're doing and you go out and you feel cold. It's not fun, but I bet you'd enjoy it. You'll have to come out sometimes.

Lex Fridman

A 100%. I mean, you're right. It does make you feel alive. Maybe that's a thing that I struggle with is the time passes slower. It does make you feel alive, you get to feel time. But then, the flip side of that is you get to feel every moment and you get to feel alive in every moment. So, it's both scary when you're inexperienced and beautiful when you are experienced. Were there times when you got hungry?

Jordan Jonas

I got shot a rabbit on day one and I snared a couple rabbits on day two and then more and more as the time went. So, I actually did pretty well on the food front. The other thing is when you have all those berries around and stuff, you do have an ability to fill your stomach, and so you don't really notice if you're getting thinner or if you're losing weight. So, I can say on Alone, I was not that hungry. I've definitely been really hungry in Russia. There were times when I lost a lot of weight. I lost a lot more weight in Siberia than I did on Alone.

Lex Fridman

Oh, wow.

Jordan Jonas

In times of -

Lex Fridman

Okay, we'll have to talk about it. So, you caught a fish, you caught a couple?

Jordan Jonas

I think I caught 13 or so. They didn't show a lot of them.

Lex Fridman

You caught 13 fish?

Jordan Jonas

Thirteen of those big fish, dudes. Well, I caught a couple that were small.

Lex Fridman

This is like a meme at this point.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, it was a -

Lex Fridman

You're a perfect example of a person who was thriving.

Jordan Jonas

I always thought in hindsight, again, when I was out there, I never let myself think you might way, and I just was going to be out there as long as I could and tried to remain pessimistic about it. But I remember a thought that I was like, "I wonder if they're going to be able to make this look hard." I did have that thought at one point because it went pretty well. And definitely it was hard psychologically because I didn't know when it was going to end. I thought this could go, like I said, six months, it could go eight months, a year, and then you start to... a two and a three-year-old and you start to weigh in the, "Is it worth it if it goes a year and it's not worth it if it goes eight months and I still lose?" So, I feel like I had this pressure and it was psychologically difficult for that reason. Physically, it wasn't too bad.

Lex Fridman

This is off mic. We're talking about Gordon Ryan competing in jiu-jitsu. And maybe that's the challenge he also has to face is to make things look hard. Because he's so dominant in the sport that in terms of the drama and the entertainment of the sport, in this case of survival, it has to be difficult.

Jordan Jonas

And I'll add that for sure though, that it's the woods, it's nature. You never know how it's going to go. You know what I mean? It's like every time you're out there, it's a different scenario. So, whatever. Hallelujah, it went well.

Lex Fridman

So, you won after 77 days. How long do you think you could have lasted?

Jordan Jonas

When I left, I weighed what I do right now. So, I just weighed my normal weight. I had a couple hundred pounds of moose. I had at least a hundred pounds of fish. I had a pile of rabbits, a wolverine, I had all of this stuff and I hadn't gotten cold yet. I just thought, but in my head I thought, "If I get today a 130 or 40, even if someone else has big game, I had a pretty good idea they might quit because it would be long, cold, dark days." And how miserable is that? Just it's so boring. It's freezing. And so, I thought the only time I thought I could think about winning is when I got to day 130 or 40. And I definitely had that with what I had. Now, maybe I would've... I probably would've gotten more. I had caught that big 20 something pound pike on the last day I was there. Maybe catch some more of those. And I don't know, I don't know how many calories I had stored, but I had a lot. And so, how long

would that have lasted me assuming I didn't get anything else? It definitely would have... I would definitely would've reached my goal of a 130 or 40 days. And then, after that I thought we were just going to push into the... then it's just to see how much who has what reserves and will go as far as we can. And that would get me through January into February. And I just thought, "Man, that's going to be miserable for people."

Lex Fridman

And you were like, "I can last through."

Jordan Jonas

And I knew I could do it. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

What aspect of that is miserable?

Jordan Jonas

The hardest thing for me would've been the boredom because it's hard to stay busy when it's all dark out. When the ice is three, four foot thick, you can't fish. And I just think it would've just been really boring. It would've had to been a real Zen master to push through it. But because I had experienced it some degree, I knew I could. And then, I think things that might, you start thinking about family and this and that in those situations. And I just knew that those... because I had gone to all these trips to Russia for a year at a time, the time context was a little broader for me than I think for some people. Because I knew I could be gone for a year and come back, catch up with my loved ones, bring what I got back, whether that'd be psychological, whatever it is, and we'd all enrich each other. And once it's in hindsight, that year would've been like that, talking about it. So, I had that perspective. And so, I knew I wasn't going to tap for any other reason other than running out of food someday. So, that was my stressor.

Lex Fridman

So, you're able to, given the boredom, given them loneliness, zoom out and accept the passing of time, just let it pass?

Jordan Jonas

For me, I'm going to fairly act. I like to be active, and so I would try to think of creative ways to keep my brain busy. We saw the dumb rabbit for skit, but then I did a whole bunch of elaborate Normandy, reinvasion, invasion enactments and stuff. There was every day I would think of, "I got to think of something to make me laugh and then do some stupid skit." And then, that would fill a couple hours of my time, and then I'd spend an hour or two, a few hours fishing, and then you'd spend a few hours, whatever you're doing.

Lex Fridman

Would you do that without a camera?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Oh no. The skits, funny question. That's a good question. I don't know. I actually don't know that. I'll say that was one of the advantages of being on the show versus in Siberia. So, no, because I didn't. In Siberia just do skits by myself, but I didn't film it. And so, it was quite nice to have this camera that made you feel like you weren't quite as alone as if you were just in the woods by yourself. And I think for me, I was able to... it was a pain. It was part of the cause of me missing that moose. There's issues with it, but I just chose to look at it like, this is an awesome opportunity to share with people, a part of me that most people don't get to see. So, that was, I just chose to look at it that way and it was an advantage because you could do stuff like that.

Lex Fridman

I think there's actual power to doing this kind of documenting, like talking to a camera or an audio recorder. That's an actual tool in survival because I had a little bit of an experience of being out alone in the jungle and just being able to talk to a thing is much less lonely.

Jordan Jonas

It is. It really is. It can be a powerful tool, just sharing your experience. I definitely had the thought. So, going back to your earlier comment, but I definitely had the thought if I knew I was the last person on earth, I wouldn't even bother. I wouldn't do that. I would just probably not hunt. I'd just give up. I'm sure, because even if I had a bunch of food and this and that, but because I knew you... you know you're a part, you're sharing, it gives you a lot of strength to go through and having that camera just makes it that much more vivid because you know you're not just going to be sharing a vague memory, but an actual experience.

Lex Fridman

I think if you're the last person on earth, you would actually convince yourself, first of all, you don't know for sure. There's always going to be -

Jordan Jonas

Hope dies last.

Lex Fridman

Hope really does die last because you really don't know. You really hope to find. I mean, if an apocalypse happens, I think your whole life will become about finding the other person.

Jordan Jonas

It would be and there's a... I mean I guess I'm saying, "If you knew you were for some reason, knew you were the last, I wonder if you would. I wonder if..." that was a thought I had if I

knew I was the last person. Because here I was having a good time, having fun fishing, plenty of food. But if I knew I was the last person on earth, I don't know that I would even bother. But now, if that was for real, would I bother? That's the question.

Lex Fridman

No, no. I think if you knew, if some way you knew for sure, I think your mind will start doubting it that whoever told you you're the last person, whatever was lying.

Jordan Jonas

Right. The power of hope might be more -

Lex Fridman

More powerful than -

Jordan Jonas

... than I accounted for in that situation.

Lex Fridman

Also, if you are indeed the last person you might want to be documenting it for once you die, an alien species comes about because whatever happened on earth is a pretty special thing. And if you're the last one, you might be the last person to tell the story of what happened. And so, that's going to be a way to convince yourself that this is important. And so, the days will go by like this, but it would be lonely. Boy would that be lonely.

Jordan Jonas

It would be. Well, delving into the dredges, the depths of something.

Lex Fridman

There is going to be existential dread, but also, I don't know. I think hope will burn bright. You'll be looking for other humans.

Jordan Jonas

That's one of the reasons I was looking forward to talking to you. Things I appreciate about you is you're always not out of naivety, but you're always choose to look at the positive. You know what I mean? And I think that's a powerful mindset to have appreciated.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that'd be a pretty cool survival situation though. If you're the last person on earth.

Jordan Jonas

At least you could share it.

Lex Fridman

You could share it. Yeah. Like I said, many people consider you the most successful competitor on Alone. The other successful one is Roland Welker, Rock House guy.

Jordan Jonas

Oh yeah.

Lex Fridman

This is just a fun, ridiculous question, but head-to-head, who do you think survives longer?

Jordan Jonas

If you want to get me the competitive side of it, I would just say, "Well, I'm pretty dang sure I had more pounds of food." And I didn't have the advantage in knowing when it would end, which I think would've been a great psychological. It would've made it really easy. Once I got the moose, I could have shot the moose and just not stressed. That would've been like... And so, that was a big difference between the seasons that I felt... I mean, I felt like the psychology of season seven, they messed up by doing a hundred-day cap because for my own experience, that was the hardest part. But Roland's a beast.

Lex Fridman

So, for people who don't know, they put a hundred-day cap on. So, it's whoever can survive a hundred days for that season. It's interesting to hear that for you, the uncertainty not knowing when it ends.

Jordan Jonas

That was for sure.

Lex Fridman

It's the hardest. That's true. It's like you wake up every day.

Jordan Jonas

I didn't know how to ration my food. I didn't know if I was going to lose after six months and then it was all going to be for not. I didn't know. There's so many unknowns. You don't know. Like I said, if I shot a moose and it was a hundred days done, if I shot a moose and you don't know, it's like, "Crap, I could still lose to somebody else." But it's going to be way in the future. So, anyway, that for me was definitely the hard part.

Lex Fridman

When you found out that you won and your wife was there, it was funny because you were really happy, there was great moment of you reuniting. But also, there's a state of shock of you look like you were ready to go much longer.

Jordan Jonas

That was the most genuine shock I could have. I hadn't even entertained the thought yet. I didn't even think it was... you'd hear the helicopters and I just assumed there was other people out there. I just hadn't... I thought, and for one, the previous person that had gone the longest had gone 89 days. So, I just knew whoever else was out here with me, somebody's got that in their crosshairs. They're going to get to 90 and they're not going to quit at 90, they're going to go to a 100. I just figured we can't start thinking about the end until a couple months from when it ended. So, I was just shocked and they tricked me pretty good. They know how to make you think that you're not alone.

Lex Fridman

So, they want you to just be surprised?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, they want it to be a surprise.

Lex Fridman

So, you really weren't... I mean, you have to do that, I guess for survival. Don't be counting the days.

Jordan Jonas

No, I think that would be... then you see that on some of the people do that. For myself that would be bad psychology because then you're just always disappointing yourself. You have to be resettled with the fact that this is going to go a long time and suck. Once you come to peace with that, maybe you'll be pleasantly surprised, but you're not going to be constantly disappointed.

Lex Fridman

So, what was your diet like? What was your eating habits like during that time? How many meals a day? This is -

Jordan Jonas

Oh man. Oh, no.

Lex Fridman

Was it one meal a day or?

Jordan Jonas

I was trying to eat the thing. I was not trying to - that the more the moose is hanging out there, the more the critters. Every critter in the forest is trying to peck at it or mice trying to eat it and stuff.

Lex Fridman

So, one of the ways you can protect the food is by eating it?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. So, I was having three good meals a day, and then I'd cook up some meat and go to sleep and then wake up in the middle of the night because there's long nights and have some meat at night, eat a bunch at night. So, I'd usually have a fish stew for lunch and then moose for breakfast and dinner and then have some for a nighttime snack. Because the nights were long, so you'd be in bed 14 hours and wake up and eat and you dink around and go back to sleep.

Lex Fridman

Is it okay that it was pretty low-carb situation?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, I actually felt really good. I think I would've felt better if I would've had a higher percentage of fat because it's still more protein than if you're on a keto diet, you want a lot of fat. And so, I didn't try to mix in nature's carbs, different reindeer lichen and things like that. But honestly, I felt pretty good on that diet. We'll see.

Lex Fridman

What's the secret to protecting food? What are the different ways to protect food?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. There's a lot of times in a typical situation in the woods hunting, you'll raise it up in a tree, in a bag, put it in a game bag so the birds can't peck at it and hang it in a tree. So, that it cools. You got to make sure first to cool it because it'll spoil. So, you cool it by whatever means necessary, hanging it in a cool place, letting the air blow around it. And then, you'll notice that every forest freeloader in the woods is going to come and try to steal your food. And it was just fun. I mean, it was crazy to watch. It's all the Jay, all the camp Jays pecking at it. Everything I did, there was something that could get to it. If put on the ground, the mice get on it and they poop on it and they mess it up. So, ultimately it just dawned on me, "Shoot, I'm going to have to build one of those Evenki like food caches. So, I did and I put it up there and I thought I solved my problem. To be honest, the Evenki then, so they would've taken a page out of, they would've mixed me and Roland's solution. They build this tall stilt shelter and then put a box on the top that's enclosed. And then, the bears can't get to it, the mice can't poop on it, the birds, the wolverine, it's safe. And I never finished it. In hindsight, I don't actually know why. I think just the way it timed. I didn't think something was going to get up there. Then, it did. And then, you're counting calories and stuff. I should have in hindsight, just boxed it in right away.

Lex Fridman

To get ready for the long haul?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, yeah, yeah.

Lex Fridman

Is a rabbit starvation a real thing?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. So, you can't just live off protein and rabbits are almost just protein. I'd kill a rabbit, eat the innards and the brain and the eyes, and then everything else is just protein. And so, it takes more calories to process that protein than you're getting from it without the fat. So, you actually lose... I had a lot of rabbits in the first 20 days. I had 28 rabbits or something, but I was losing weight at exactly the same speed as everybody else that didn't have anything. So, that's interesting.

Lex Fridman

That's fascinating.

Jordan Jonas

And I'd never tried that before. So, I was wondering if I'm catching a ton of rabbits, I wonder if I can last, what, six months on rabbits? But no, you just starve as fast as everybody else. So, I had to learn that on the fly and adjust.

Lex Fridman

I wonder what to make of that. So, you need fat to survive, like fundamentally?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. And you'll notice when the wolverine came or when animals came, they would eat the skin off of the fish. They would eat the eyes. They'd steal the moose. They'd leave all the meat.

Lex Fridman

Bunch of fat?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Behind the eyes is a bunch of fat. So, yeah, you can observe nature and see what they're eating and know where the gold is.

Lex Fridman

What do you like eating when you can eat whatever you want? What do you feel best eating?

Jordan Jonas

What do I feel best? I just try to eat clean. I think I'm not super stricter on anything, but I think when I eat less carbs, I feel better. Meat and vegetables, we eat a lot of meat.

Lex Fridman

So, basically everything you ate on Alone plus some veggies?

Jordan Jonas

Plus, veggies. Throwing some buckwheat. I like buckwheat. No, I'm just kidding.

Lex Fridman

Let's step to the early days of Jordan. So, your Instagram handles Hobo Jordo. So, early on in your life you hoboed around the US on freight trains. What's the story behind that?

Jordan Jonas

My brother, when he was 17 or so, he just decided to go hitchhiking and he hitchhiked down to Reno from Idaho where we were and ended up loving traveling, but hated being dependent on other people. So, he ended up jumping on a freight train and just did it. Honestly, he pretty much got on a train and traveled the country for the next eight years on trains, lived in the streets and everywhere, but he was sober. So, it gives you a different experience than a lot. But at one point when I was, I guess, yeah, 18, he invited me to come along with him. He'd probably been doing it five or so, four or five years or more. And I said, "Sure." So, I quit my job and went out with him. Hobo Jordan is a bit of an over stuff. I feel self-conscious about that because I rode trains across the country up and down the coast, back, spent the better part of the year run around riding trains and all the staying in places related to that. But all the people, the real hobos, those guys are out there doing it for years on end. But it was such a... for me, what it felt like was, it felt like a bit of a rite of passage experience, which is missing I think in modern life. So, I did this thing that was a huge unknown. Ben was there with me and my brother for most of it. We traveled around, got pushed my boundaries in every which way, froze at night and did all this stuff. And then, at the end I actually wanted to go back and go back home. And so, I went on my own and went from Minneapolis back up to Spokane on my own, which was my first stint of time by myself for a week which was interesting.

Lex Fridman

Alone with your own thoughts?

Jordan Jonas

With your own thoughts. It was my first time in my life having been like that. And so, it was powerful at the time. What it did too is it gave me a whole different view of life because I had gotten a job when I was 13 and then 14, 15, 16, 17, and then I was just in the normal run of things and then that just threw a whole different path into my life. And then, I realized some

of the things while I was traveling that I wouldn't experience again until I was living with natives and such. And that was you wake up, you don't have a schedule, you literally just have needs and you just somehow have to meet your needs. And so, there's a really sense of freedom you get that is hard to replicate elsewhere. And so, that was eye-opening to me. And I think once I did that, I went back. So, I went back to my old job at the salad dressing plant. And there's this old cross-eyed guy and he was, "Oh, Hobo Jordo is back." And that's where I got it. But at freedom always was very important to me, I think from that time on.

Lex Fridman

What'd you learn about the United States, about the people along the way? Because I took a road trip across the US also and there's a romantic element there too of the freedom, of the... well, maybe for me not knowing what the hell I'm going to do with my life, but also excited by all the possibilities. And then, you meet a lot of different people and a lot of different kinds of stories. And also, a lot of people that support you for traveling. Because there's a lot of people dream of experiencing that freedom, at least the people I've met. And they usually don't go outside of their little town. They have a thing and they have a family usually, and they don't explore, they don't take the leap. And you can do that when you're young. I guess you could do that at any moment. Just say fuck it and leap into the abyss of being on the road. But anyway, what did you learn about this country, about the people in this country?

Jordan Jonas

You're in an interesting context when you're on trains because the trains always end up in the crappiest part of town and you're always outside interacting. Well, the interesting things, every once in a while you'll have to hitchhike to get from one place to another. One interesting thing is you notice you always get picked up by the poor people. They're the people that empathize with you, stop, pick you up, you go to whatever ghetto I remember, you end up in and people are really, "Oh, what are you guys doing?" Real friendly and relatable. It broadened my horizons for sure, from being just an Idaho kid and then meeting all these different people and just seeing the goodness in people and this and that. It's also very, a lot of drugs and a lot of people with mental issues that you're friends with, dealing with and all that kind of stuff.

Lex Fridman

Any memorable characters?

Jordan Jonas

Well, there's a few for sure. I mean a lot of them I still know that are still around. Rocco was one guy we traveled, he's become like a brother, but he traveled with my brother for years because they were the two sober guys. He rather than traveling because he was hooked on stuff, did it to escape all that. And so, he was sober and straight edge and he always like 5'7" Italian guy that was always getting in fights. And he has his own sense of ethics that I think

is really interesting because he is super honest, but he expects it of others. And so, it's funny in the modern context, the thing that pops in my head is when he got a car for the first time, which wasn't that long, he was in his 30s or something and he registered it, which he was mad about that he had to register. But then, the next year they told him he had to register again and he is like, "What did you lose my registration?" went down there to the DMV, chewed him out that he had to reregister, because he already registered. Where's the paperwork? But he just views the world from a different lens. I thought, but on everything, he's a character. Now, he just lives by digging up bottles and finding treasures in them.

Lex Fridman

But he notices the injustices in the world and speaks up.

Jordan Jonas

And speaks up and he is always like, "Why doesn't everybody else speak up about their car registration?" And then, there was, Devo comes to mind because he was such a unique character as far as just for one, he would've lived to be a 120 because the amount of chemicals and everything else he put into his body and still, "Hey man," one of those guys, he could always get a dime. "Oh, spare dime. Spare dime." He would bum change. And I'd see him sometimes and I'd be gone and then go to New York to visit my sister or something. And I'd, "Sure enough, there's Devo on the street. What do you know?" You go visit him in the hospital because he got bit by 27 hobo spider bites. It was just always rough, but charismatic, vital, the vitality of life was in him, but it was just so permeated with drugs and alcohol too. It's interesting.

Lex Fridman

Because I've met people like that, they're just, yeah, joy permeates the whole way of being and they're like, they've been through some. They have scars, they've got it rough, but they've always got a big smile. There's a guy I met in the jungle named Pico. He lost a leg and he drives a boat and he just always has a big smile. Even given that the hardship he has to get, everything requires a huge amount of work, but he's just big smile and there's stories in those eyes.

Jordan Jonas

There was something about enduring difficulty that makes you able to appreciate life and look at it and smile.

Lex Fridman

Any advice, if I were to take a road trip again or if somebody else is thinking of hopping out on a freight train or hitchhiking?

Jordan Jonas

Way easier now because you have a map on your phone and you tell you're going, "You're cheating now."

Lex Fridman

It's not about the destiny, because the map is about the destination, but here is like you don't really give a damn.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Right. The train is where you're going. You're not going anywhere.

Lex Fridman

Exactly.

Jordan Jonas

I say do it. Go out and do things, especially when you're young. Experiences and stuff, help create the person you will be in the future. Doing things that you think like, "Oh, I don't want to do that. I'm a little scared of that." I mean, that's what you got to do. You just get out of your - scared of that. That's what you got to do. You just get out of your comfort zone, and you will grow as a person, and you'll go through a lot of wild experiences along the way. Say yes to life in that way.

Lex Fridman

Say yes to life. Yeah. I love the boredom of it.

Jordan Jonas

Freight train riding is very boring, and you'll wait for hours for a train that never comes, and then you'll go to the store, and come back and it'll be gone. You're like, "No." But I remember, we went to jail, we got out and then -

Lex Fridman

How'd you end up in jail?

Jordan Jonas

It was things, trespassing on a train, but we were riding a train, and my brother woke up, and they had a dead outland on his head, and hit the train and fell on him. And we woke up and we were laughing. That's got to be some kind of bad omen. And then, we were looking out of the train, and we saw a train worker look, and saw us and he went, like, "Oh, we know that's a bad omen." Anyway, sure enough, the police stopped the train. Somebody had seen us on it, and they searched it, got us and threw us in jail. It was not a big deal. We were in jail a couple days, but when we got out, of course they put us... We were in some podunk town in Indiana and we didn't know where to catch out of there. And so, we were at some factory and we

just banning factory. And we were right there for four days, no train that was going slow enough that we could catch. And then, we found this big old roll of aluminum foil, and now I got to apologize to this woman because we were so bored just sitting there. We built these hats, like horns coming out every which way, and loops, and just sitting there. And it was that night and some minivan pulled up to this train that was going by too. We're like, "Rr-rr-rr." We were circling the car.

Lex Fridman

Just entertaining yourself.

Jordan Jonas

Entertaining yourself with whatever you can. The poor lady was terrified.

Lex Fridman

So, hitchhiking was tough.

Jordan Jonas

I didn't like hitchhiking, just because you're depending on the other people. I don't know why, you just want to be independent, but you do meet really cool people. A lot of times there's really nice people that pick you up and that's cool. But I just personally actually didn't do it a lot and I wasn't... If you're on the streets for 10 years, you'll end up doing it a lot more because you need to get from point A to point B, but we just tried to avoid it as much as we could because it didn't appeal to us as much.

Lex Fridman

Well, one downside of hitchhiking is people talk a lot.

Jordan Jonas

They do.

Lex Fridman

It's both the pro and the con.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Sometimes you just want to be alone with your thoughts or there is a kind of lack of freedom in having to listen to a person that's giving you a ride.

Jordan Jonas

It's so true. And then, you don't know how to react too. I was young, I remember I got picked up, I was probably 19 or something, and then I was just like, "Hey, how's it going?" She's like, "I'm fine. Husband just died." And then, there's all, "And I got diagnosed with cancer, and this is and that." And pretty bitter, and all that, and understandably so, but you're just like, "I have no idea how to respond here."

Lex Fridman

Because you -

Jordan Jonas

And then, you're young, and you had to be nice and that. And I remember that ride being interesting because I didn't really know how to respond, and she was angry, and going through some stuff and dumping it out. She didn't have anyone else to dump it out on. I was like, "Wow."

Lex Fridman

I'm going to take the freight train next time. So, how'd you end up in Siberia?

Jordan Jonas

I'll try to keep it a little bit short on the how. But the long story short was I had a brother that's adopted, and when he grew up, he wanted to find his biological mom and just tell her thanks. And so, he did. He was probably 20 or something, he found his biological mom, told her things. Turns out he had a brother that was going to go over to Russia and help build this orphanage. And that brother was about my age. I remember at that time I read this verse that said, "If you're in the darkness and see no light, just continue following me," basically. I was like, "Okay, I'm going to take that to the bank even though I don't know if it's true or not." And then, the only glimpse of light I got in all that was when I heard about that orphanage to go build that orphanage. And I prayed about it and I felt, and I can't explain, it brought me to tears. I felt so strongly that I should go. And so, I was like, "Well, that's a clear call. I'm just going to do it." So, I just bought a ticket, got a visa for a year, and then I went, and helped build an orphanage and we got that built. But he was an American and I wanted to live with the Russians to learn the language. And so, he sent me to a neighboring village to live with a couple Russian families that needed a hand, somebody to watch their kids, and cut their hay, and milk the cow and all that. So, I found myself in that little Russian village, just getting to know these two guys and their families. It was pretty fascinating. And of course, I didn't know the language yet and they were two awesome dudes. Both of them had been in prison, and met each other in prison, and were really close because they found God in prison together, and got out and stayed connected. And so, I'd bounce back between those two families and they used to always tell me about their third buddy they had been in prison with who was a native fur trapper now in the north. And so, they'd go, "You got to go meet our buddy up north." And one day that guy came through to sell furs in the city, and he invited

me to come live with him, and my visa was about to expire, but I was like, "When I come back, I'll come." And so, I went back home, earned some more money and did some construction or whatever. Then, went back and headed north to hang out with Yura and fur trap. And that started a whole new... Opened world that I didn't know about.

Lex Fridman

Before we talk about Yura and fur trapping, let's actually rewind. And would you describe that moment when you were in the darkness as a crisis of faith?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. Yeah, for sure. It was darkness in that I didn't know how to parse what is this thing that's my faith, and what's the wheat, and what's the chaff and how do I get through it? And I basically just clung to keeping it really simple and oddly enough in my Christian path that God was actually defined in a certain God is love. And I was just like, "That's the only thing I'm going to cling to." And I'm going to try to express that in my life in whichever way I can and just trust that if I do that, if I act like I... I've heard this lately, but if you just act like you believe, over time, that world kind of opens to you. When I said I would go to Russia, I prayed and I was like, "Lord, I don't see you. I don't know, but I got this what I felt like was a clear call. I have only one request and that is that you would give me the faith to match my action." I'm choosing to believe. I could choose not to because whatever, but I'm going to choose to act and I just ask to have faith someday. And honestly, for the whole first year I went through, that was a very crazy time for me, learning the language, being isolated, being misunderstood, blah-blah, but then trying to approach all that with a loving open heart. And then, I came back and I realized that that prayer had been answered. That wasn't the end of my journey, but I was like, "Whoa, that was my deepest request that I could come up with and somehow that had been answered."

Lex Fridman

So, through that year, you were just like, first of all, you couldn't speak the language. That's really tough. That's really tough.

Jordan Jonas

It's tough because it's unlike on a loan where... Because not only can you not speak and you feel isolated, but you're also misunderstood all the time, so you seem like an idiot and all that. And so, that was tough. I felt very alone at that time, at certain times in that journey.

Lex Fridman

But you were radiating, like you said, lead with love. So, you were radiating this comradery, this compassion for -

Jordan Jonas

I was really intentional about trying to – I don't know why I'm here, I just know that that's my call is to love one another. And so, I would just try to... And then it meant digging people's wells. It might meant just going and visiting that old lady babushka up at the house that's lonely, and that was really cool. I got to talk to some fascinating ladies, and stuff, and then go to that village, help those families. I'm going to be like cut the hay, be the most hardest worker I can be because that's my goal here. I didn't have any other agenda or anything except to try to live a life of love and I couldn't define it beyond that.

Lex Fridman

What was it like learning the Russian language?

Jordan Jonas

It was super interesting. I think I had the thought while I was learning it, one that it was way too hard. If I would've just learned Spanish or German, I would be so much farther. But here I am a year in and I'm like, "How do you say I want cheese properly?" But at the same time, it was really cool to learn a language that I thought in a lot of ways was richer than English. It's a very rich language. I remember there was a comedy act in Russian, but he was saying, "One word you can't have in English is [foreign language 01:17:32]," meaning I didn't drink enough to get drunk. That type thing. But it's just that you can make up these words using different prefixes, and suffixes, and blend them in a way that is quite unique and interesting. And honestly, would be really good for poetry because it also doesn't have sentence structure in the same way English does. The words can be jumbled in a way.

Lex Fridman

And somehow in the process of jumbling some humor, some musicality comes out. It's interesting. You can be witty in Russian much easier than you can in English, witty and funny. And also with poetry, you can say profound things by messing with words in the order of words, which is hilarious because you had a great conversation with Joe Rogan. And on that program, you talked about how to say I love you in Russian, just hilarious. And it was for me, the first time, I don't know why you were a great person to articulate the flexibility and the power of the Russian language. That's really interesting.

Jordan Jonas

Interesting.

Lex Fridman

Because you were saying [foreign language 01:18:40], you could say every single order, every single combination of ordering of those words has the same meaning, but slightly different.

Jordan Jonas

And it would change the meaning if you took ya out and just said, [foreign language 01:19:03]. There's a different emphasis or maybe or [foreign language 01:19:06] or something, all these different –

Lex Fridman

Or just [foreign language 01:19:10] also.

Jordan Jonas

Right, exactly. So, it is rich, and it was interesting coming from an English context, and getting a glimpse of that, and then wondering about all those Russian authors that we all appreciate that, oh, we actually aren't getting the full deal here.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, definitely. I've recently become a fan actually of Larissa Volokhonsky and Richard Pervear. They're these world-famous translators of Russian literature, Tolstoy, Dostoevsky, Chekov, Pushkin, Bulgakov, Pasternak. They've helped me understand just how much of an art form translation really is. Some authors do that art more translatable than others, like Dostoevsky is more translatable, but then you can still spend a week on one sentence.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Just how do I exactly capture this very important sentence? But I think what's more powerful is not literature, but conversation, which is one of the reasons I've been carrying and feeling the responsibility of having conversations with Russian speakers because I can still see the music of it, I can still see the wit of it. And in conversation comes out really interesting kinds of wisdom. When I listen to world leaders that speak Russian speak, and I see the translation, and it loses the irony. In between the words, if you translate them literally, you lose the reference in there to the history of the peoples.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, for sure. And I've definitely seen that on, and if you listen to, I think it probably was a Putin speech or something, and you just see that, "Oh wow, something major is being lost in translation." You can actually see it happen. I wouldn't be surprised if that wasn't the case with that whole greatest tragedy as the fall of the Soviet Union that I hear him being quoted as saying all the time. I bet you there's something in there that's being lost in translation that is interesting.

Lex Fridman

I think the thing I see the most lost in translation is the humor.

Jordan Jonas

I'll just say that that was tangibly the hardest part about learning the language is that humor comes last and you have to wait. You have to wait that whole year or however long it takes you to learn the language to be able to start getting the humor. Some of it comes through, but you miss so much nuance and that was really difficult in interaction with people to just be the guy when there's humor going on and you're totally oblivious to it.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, everybody's laughing and you're like trying to laugh along. What did they make of you?

Jordan Jonas

To be honest -

Lex Fridman

This person that came from, descended upon us.

Jordan Jonas

Totally.

Lex Fridman

All full of love.

Jordan Jonas

If I had a nickel for every time I heard like, "Oh, Americans suck, but you're a good American. You're the only good American I've ever met." But then of course they never met.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, exactly. You're the only one.

Jordan Jonas

But I think because I was just tried to work hard, tried to be more useful than I was during all that, they all... I think it was pretty appreciated me out there. I've definitely heard that a lot, so that's nice.

Lex Fridman

Can you talk about their way of life? So, when you're doing fur trapping -

Jordan Jonas

Fur trapping was an interesting experience. Basically, what you do in October or something, you'll go out to a hunting cabin and you'll have three hunting cabins. You'll go stock them with noodles or whatever it is. And then, for the next couple months or however long, you'll go from one cabin. Usually, the guys are just out there doing this on their own. So, they'll go

out, and they'll go from one cabin, and each cabin will have five or six trap lines going out of it. Every day, it'll take a half a day to walk to the end of your trap line, open all the traps and a half a day to get back. And they'll do that. They'll spend a week at a cabin, open up all the traps, and then it'll take a day to hike over to the other cabin. Go to that one, open up all those traps, and then there, and then three weeks later or so, they'll end up back at the first cabin, and then check all the traps. And so, it's that rhythm. And they'll do that for a couple, few months during the winter. And you're trapping sable, they're called sable, like Pine Martin is what we would have the equivalent of over here.

Lex Fridman

What is it?

Jordan Jonas

It's like a weasel, a furry little weasel. And they make coats out of it. When I went, he showed me how to open the trap, showed me the ropes, gave me a topographical map. There's one cabin, there's the other. And we parted ways for five weeks. We did run into each other once in the middle there at a cabin. But other than that, you're just off by yourself hoping to shoot a grouse or something to add to your noodles, and make your meal better or catch a fish. And then working really hard, trying not to get lost and stuff.

Lex Fridman

How do you get from one trap location to the next?

Jordan Jonas

That's funny because it was both basically by landmarks and feel. I didn't have compass and things like that.

Lex Fridman

By feel. Okay.

Jordan Jonas

I got myself into trouble once, and the first time I went to one cabin, I got myself into trouble. First time I went to the other cabin, I nailed it. And so, I had two different experiences on my first trip, but the one that I nailed it, I remember I had to go and it's like a day hike. I was like, "Well, I know the cabin south, and so if I just walk south, the sun should be on the left in the morning, and right in front of me in the middle of the day, and by evening it should end up at my right." And just guess what time it is and follow along. And it takes all day and I kid you not, I ended up a hundred yards from the cabin. I was like, "Whoa, this is the trail and that's the cabin," like, "Oh, amazing." And then, the other time I went out and I was heading over the mountains and I thought hours had passed. I probably had gotten slightly lost, and then I thought I was halfway there. So, I thought, "Okay, I'm going to sit down and cook some food, get a drink. I'm thirsty." So, I sat down, and went to start a fire,

and my matches had gotten all wet because the snow had fallen on me, and soaked me, and I didn't have them wrapped in plastic. I was like, "Oh no, I can't drink water." So, I was like, "Well, I'm just going to power through." I'm halfway there where I kept hiking and then I realized it was getting night. And then, I even realized I was at the halfway point because I saw this rock. I was like, "Oh no, that's the halfway point." I was like, "I can't do this." And so, I need to go get water. I ended up having to divert down the mountain and head to the water. There was a whole ordeal. I had to take my skis off because I was going through an old forest fire burn, so they were all really close trees, but then the snow was like this deep. So, I was just trudging through and just wishing a bear would eat me, get it over with. But I finally made it down to the water, chopped a hole through the ice, I was able to take a sip.

Lex Fridman

So, you were severely dehydrated?

Jordan Jonas

Severely dehydrated and I -

Lex Fridman

Exhausted.

Jordan Jonas

Exhausted.

Lex Fridman

Cold.

Jordan Jonas

Cold. You feel nervous. You're in over your head. And then, I got down to the river, chopped a hole in the ice, drank it, hiked up the river and eventually got to the other cabin. It was probably 3:00 in the morning or something.

Lex Fridman

So, you chopped a hole in the ice to drink?

Jordan Jonas

To get some water. I was like -

Lex Fridman

Was this got to be one of the worst days of your life?

Jordan Jonas

It was a bad day, for sure. I've had a few. It was a bad day. And here's what was funny is I got to the cabin at 3:00 in the morning and I should have brushed over a lot of the misery that I had felt. And I laid down, I was about to go to sleep, and then Yura charges in from there. I was like, "Whoa, dude, what are you doing?" And I was like, "How's it going?" He said, "Oh, it sucks." And you laid down and just fell asleep. I fell asleep and I was like... Oh, that's funny. The last few weeks that we've been apart, who knows what he went through, who knows why he was there at that time at night, all just summarized and it sucked. And we went to sleep, and the next morning we parted ways and who knows what.

Lex Fridman

And you didn't really tell him -

Jordan Jonas

Never. Neither of us said what happened. It was just like, "Oh, that's interesting."

Lex Fridman

Yeah. And he probably was through similar kinds of things.

Jordan Jonas

Who knows? Yeah.

Lex Fridman

What gave you strength in those hours when you're just going to waste high snow, all of that? You're laughing, but that's hard.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. You know that Russian phrase [foreign language 01:27:48]?

Lex Fridman

Eyes are afraid, hands do. I'm sure there's a poetic way to translate that.

Jordan Jonas

Right. It's like just put one foot in front of the other. When you think about what you have to do, it's really intimidating, but you just know if I just do it, if I just do it, if I just keep trudging, eventually I'll get there. And pretty soon you realize, "Oh, I've covered a couple kilometers." And so, when you're really in it in those moments, I guess you're just putting your head down and getting through.

Lex Fridman

I've had similar moments. There's wisdom to that. Just take it one step at a time.

Jordan Jonas

One step at a time. I think that a lot. Honestly, I tell myself that a lot when I'm about to do something really hard, just [foreign language 01:28:26], one step at a time. I'm just going to get... Don't sit there and think, "Oh, that's a long ways." Just go, and then you'll look back and you covered a bunch of ground.

Lex Fridman

One of the things I've realized that was helpful in the jungle, that was one of the biggest realizations for me is it really sucks right now. But when I look back at the end of the day, I won't really remember exactly how much it sucked. I have a vague notion of it sucking and I'll remember the good things. So, being dehydrated, I'll remember drinking water, and I won't really remember the hours of feeling like shit.

Jordan Jonas

That's absolutely true. It's so funny how just awareness of that, having been through it and then being aware of it means next time you face it, you'll be like, "You know what, once this is over, I'm going to look back on it and it's going to be like that and nothing." And I'll actually laugh about it and think it was... It's the thing I'll remember. I remember that story of that miserable day going down to the ice and I can smile about it now. And now that I know that, I can be in a miserable position and realize that that's what the outcome will be once it's over. It's just going to be a story.

Lex Fridman

If you survive though.

Jordan Jonas

If you survive and that can be -

Lex Fridman

So, you mentioned you've learned about hunger during these times. When was the hungriest you've gotten that you remember?

Jordan Jonas

It was the first time. So, to continue the story slightly, I went fur trapping with that guy. And then, it turned out all his cousins were these native nomadic reindeer herders. And after I earned his trust, and he liked me a lot, he took me out to his cousins who were all these nomads living in teepees. I was like, "This is awesome. I didn't even know people still lived like this." And they were really open and welcoming because their cousin just brought me out there and vouched for me. But it was during fencing season and fencing in Siberia for those reindeer is an incredible thing. You take an axe, you go out and you just build these 30-kilometer loop fences with just logs interlocking. It's tons of work. And all these guys are more efficient bodies, they're better at it. And I'm just working less efficiently and also a lot

bigger dude, but we're all just on the same rations kind of. And I got down that. I was like 155 pounds getting down pretty dang skinny for my 6'3" frame and just working really hard. And in the spring in Siberia, there's not much to forage. In the fall, you can have pine nuts and this and that, but in the spring, you're just stuck with whatever random food you've got. And so, that's where I lost the most weight, and felt the most hungry, and I had a lot of other issues. I was new to that type of work. And so, working as hard as I could, but also making mistakes, chopping myself with the axe and getting injured, all kinds of stuff.

Lex Fridman

So, injuries plus very low calorie intake.

Jordan Jonas

Low, yeah.

Lex Fridman

And exhausted.

Jordan Jonas

I remember if you got... You were this poor son of a gun to get stuck slicing the bread, you're here cutting the bread and somebody throws all the spoons and drops the pot of soup there. And it's like before you can even done slicing, you slice all the meats like gone from the bowl. Everybody else has grabbed the spoon in midair and you're just like, "Ah." Hoping this one little noodle is going to give me a lot of nourishment.

Lex Fridman

Wow. So, everybody gets, I mean, yeah, first come, first serve I guess.

Jordan Jonas

Because it's like all the dudes out there working on the fence.

Lex Fridman

So, you mentioned the axe and you gave me a present. This is probably the most badass present I've ever gotten. So, tell me the story of this axe.

Jordan Jonas

So, the natives, when I got there, I grew up on a farm. I thought I was pretty good with an axe, but they do tons of work with those things and I really grew to love their type of axe, their style of axe, and just an axe in general. They'd always say it's the one tool you need to survive in the wilderness and I agree. Because this one has certain design features that the natives... That was unique to the Evenki, key to the natives I was with. One is with these Russian heads or the Soviet heads, whatever they had, they're a little wider on top here. Meaning, you can put the handle through from the top like a tomahawk, and that means

you're not dealing with a wedge. And if it ever loosens and you're swinging, it only gets tighter. It doesn't fly off. And so, that's something that's cool. What they do that's unique is, so you can see, this is the wolverine axe. So, it's got the little wolverine head in honor of the wolverine I fought on the show.

Lex Fridman

So, you have actually two axes. This is one of the smaller.

Jordan Jonas

This is a little smaller. I didn't want to make it too small because you need something to actually work out there. You need something kind of serious. But then they sharpen it from one side. So, if you're right-handed, you sharpen it from the right side. And that means when you're in the woods and living, there's a lot of times whether you're making a table, or a sleigh, or an axe handle or whatever you're doing, that you're holding the wood and doing this work. And it makes it really good for that planing. The other thing it is, especially in northern woods, all the trees are like this big. You're never cutting down a big giant tree. And so, when you swing with a single sided axe like this, sharpen from the one side, with your right-hand swing like this, it really bites into the wood and gives you a... Because with that, if you can picture it, that angle is going to cause deflection. And without that angle on your right hand and swing, it just bites in there like crazy. And so, that, there's other little... The handle is made by some Amish guys in Canada. This is all hand forged by -

Lex Fridman

Its hand forged.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, looking -

Jordan Jonas

And so, it's a pretty sweet little axe.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's amazing.

Jordan Jonas

There's other thing, I slightly rounded this pole here. It's just a little nuance because when you pound a stake in, if you picture it, if it's convex, when you're pounding it, it's going to blow the fibers apart. If it has just a slight concave, it helps hold the fibers together. And so,

it's a little nuance, not too flat because you want to still be able to use the back as you would.

Lex Fridman

What kind of stuff are you using the axe for?

Jordan Jonas

So, the axe is super important to chop through ice in a winter situation, which you probably hopefully won't need. But what I use an axe all the time for is when it's wet, and rainy, and you need to start a fire. It's hard to get to the middle of dry wood if just a knife or a saw. And so, I can go out there, find a dead tall tree, a dead standing tree, chop it down, split it apart, split it open, get to the dry wood on the inside, shave it some little curls and have a fire going pretty fast. And so, if I have an axe, I feel always confident that I can get a quick fire in whatever weather and I wouldn't feel the same without it in that regard. So, that's the main thing. Of course, you can use it. I use it if you're taking an animal apart or if you're... All kinds of, what else? Building a shelter, skinning teepee poles or whatever you're doing.

Lex Fridman

What's the use of a saw versus an axe?

Jordan Jonas

I greatly prefer an axe. A saw though has... Its value goes up quite a bit when you're in hardwoods. When you're in a hardwood oaks, and hickory and things like that, they're a lot harder to chop. So, a saw is pretty nice in those situations, I'd say. In those situations, I'd like to have both in the north woods and in more coniferous forests. I don't think there's enough advantages that a saw incurs. With a good axe, you'll see people with little camp axes, and stuff, and they just don't think they like axes. It's like, "Well, you haven't actually tried to..." Try a good one first and get good with it. The one thing about an axe, they're dangerous. So, you need to practice, always control it with two hands, make sure you know where it's going to go. It doesn't hit you, or when you're chopping, like say you're creating something that you're not doing it on rocks and stuff so that you're doing it on top of wood so that when you're hitting the ground, you're not dulling your axe. You got to be a little bit thoughtful about it.

Lex Fridman

Have you ever injured yourself with an axe in the early days?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. So, I had gotten a knee surgery and then about three months later, had torn my ACL. I went over to Russia and I was like, "Well, I got a good knee. It's okay." And then, that's when I was building that fence that first time. And at one point, I chopped my rubber boot with my axe because it reflected off and I was new to them. And I was really frustrated because I'd

done it before. And the native guy was like, "Oh, I think there's a boot we left." A few years ago, we left a boot four kilometers that way. So, we got the reindeer, took him, rode him over. Sure enough, there's a stump with a boot upside down, pull it off, put it on. I was like, "Sweet. I'm back in business." I went back a couple of days later, pting, chum, chopped it, cut your foot, cut my rubber boot. And I was just like, "Dang it." And I was mad enough that I just grabbed the axe, and swung it at the tree, and it just one-handed, and deflected off and bam, right into my knee.

Lex Fridman

Oh no.

Jordan Jonas

And I was like, "Oh." I fell down. I was like, "Oh my gosh," because you get your axe really razor sharp, and then just swung it into my knee. I didn't even want to look. I was like, "Oh no." I looked and it wasn't a huge wound because it had hit right on the bone of my knee, but it split the bone, cut a tendon there, and I was out in the middle of the woods. So, literally, I knew I was in shock because I'm just going to go back to teepee right now. So, I ran back to teepee, laid down, and honestly, I was stuck there for a few days. I was in so much pain and my other knee was bad. It was rough. I literally couldn't even walk at all or move. There was a plastic bag, I had to poop in it and roll to the edge of the teepee, shove it under the moss. I just totally immobilized.

Lex Fridman

I guess that should teach you to not act when you're in a state of frustration or anger.

Jordan Jonas

There you go. It's such a lesson too. There were so many of those and I was always in a little bit over my head, but like I said, you do that enough and you make a lot of mistakes, but every time you learn. Now, it's like an extension of my arm. That's not going to happen because I just know how it works now.

Lex Fridman

You mentioned wet wood. How do you start a fire when everything's around you is wet?

Jordan Jonas

It depends on your environment, but I will say in most of the forests that I spend a lot of time in, all the north woods, the best thing you can do is find a dead standing tree. So, it can be down pouring rain, and you chop that tree down and then when you split it open, no matter how much it's been raining, it'll be dry on the inside. So, chop that tree down, chop a piece, a foot long piece out, and then split that thing open and then split it again. And then, you get to that inner dry wood, and then you try to do this maybe under a spruce tree or under your own body so that it's not getting rained on while you're doing it. Make a bunch of little curls

that'll catch a flame or light, and then you make a lot more kindling and little pieces of dry wood than you think, because what'll happen, you'll light it and it'll burn through and like, "Dang it." So, just be patient, you're going to be fine. Make a nice pile of curls that you can light or spark and then get a lot of good dry kindling. And then, don't be afraid to just boom, boom, boom, pile a bunch of wood on and make a big old fire. Get warm as fast as you can. It's amazing how much that of a recharge it is when you're cold and wet.

Lex Fridman

You can throw relatively wet wood on top of that.

Jordan Jonas

Once you get that going, yeah, then it'll dry as it goes. But you need to be able to split open and get all that nice dry wood on the inside.

Lex Fridman

I saw that you mentioned that you look for fat wood. What's a fat wood?

Jordan Jonas

So, on a lot of pine trees, a place where the tree was injured when it was alive, it pumps sap to it. And this is a good point because I use this a lot. It pumps that tree full of sap and then years later the tree dies, dries out, rots away. But that sap infused wood, it's like turpentine in there. It's oily. And so, if it gets wet, you can still light it. It repulses water. And so, if you can find that in a rainstorm, you can just make a little pile of those shavings, get the crappiest spark or quickest light, and it'll sit there and burn like a factory fire starter. It's really, really nice. That's good to spot. It's a good thing to keep your eye out for.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's really fascinating. And then, you make this thing.

Jordan Jonas

That's just to get the sauna going fast. That was just doing that.

Lex Fridman

What was that? That was oil?

Jordan Jonas

It just used motor oil I had, if you mix it with some sawdust and then now, the sauna is going just like that. It's like homemade fat wood.

Lex Fridman

I don't know how many times I've watched Happy People, A Year in the Taiga by Werner Herzog. You've talked about this movie. Where is that located relative to where you were?

Jordan Jonas

So, there's this big river called the Yenisei that feeds through the middle of Russia and there's a bunch of tributaries off of it. And one of the tributaries is called the Podkammennaya Tunguska. And I was up that river and just a little ways north is another river called the Bakhta, and that's where that village is where they filmed Happy People. So, in Siberian terms, we're neighbors.

Lex Fridman

Nice.

Jordan Jonas

- in terms, we're neighbors.

Lex Fridman

Nice.

Jordan Jonas

Similar environment, similar place, that for a trapper that I was with, knew the guy in the films.

Lex Fridman

What would you say about their way of life, maybe in the way you've experienced it and the way you saw in happy people?

Jordan Jonas

There's something really, really powerful about spending that much time, being independent, depending on what we talked about a little earlier. But you're putting yourself in these situations all the time where you're uncomfortable, where it's hard, but then you're rising to the occasion, you're making it happen. There's nobody. When you're fur-trapping by yourself, there's nobody else to look at to blame for anything that goes wrong. It's just yourself that you're reliant on. And there's something about the natural rhythms that you are in when you're that connected to the natural world that really does feel like that's what we're designed for. And so, there's a psychological benefit you gain from spending that much time in that realm. And for that reason, I think that people that are connected to those ways are able to tap into a particular... I noticed it a lot with the natives. So, if I met the natives in the village, I would think of them as unhappy people. They drink a lot and always fighting. The murder rate is through the roof. The suicide rate's through the roof. But if you meet those same people out in the woods living that way of life, I thought, these are happy people. And it's an interesting juxtaposition to be the same person. But then, I lived in a native village that had the reindeer herding going on around it, and everybody benefited because of that. I also went to a native village that they didn't hold those ways anymore. And so, everybody was just in the village life. And it just felt like a dark place. Whereas, the other native village,

it was rough in the village because everybody drank all the time. But it had that escape... it had that escape valve. And then, once you're out there, it's just a whole different world. And it was such an odd juxtaposition.

Lex Fridman

It's funny that the people that go trapping experience that happiness and still don't have a self-awareness to stop themselves from then drinking and doing all the dark stuff when they go to the village. It's strange that you're not able to... you're in it, you're happy, but you're not able to reflect on the nature of that happiness.

Jordan Jonas

It's really weird. I've thought about that a lot, and I don't know the answer. It's like there's a huge draw to comfort. There's a huge... and it's all multifaceted and somewhat complex, because you can be out in the woods and have this really cool life. I will say it's a little bit different for men than women, because the men are living the dream as far as what I would like. So, you're hunting and fishing and managing reindeer and you got all these adventures. So, what ends up happening is that a lot more guys than young men out there in the woods. And so, there's a draw, also, I think, to go to the village probably to find a woman. And then there's a draw of technology and the new things. But then once they're there, honestly, alcohol becomes so overwhelming that everything else just fiddles away.

Lex Fridman

But it's funny that the comfort you find, there's a draw to comfort.

Jordan Jonas

Mmhmm.

Lex Fridman

but once you get to the comfort, once you find the comfort, within that comfort, you become the lesser version of yourself.

Jordan Jonas

Mmhmm. Yeah. Oh, for sure.

Lex Fridman

It's weird.

Jordan Jonas

What a lesson for us.

Lex Fridman

We need to keep struggling.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. A lot of times, you have to force yourself in that. So, if we took them as an example, I mean, a lot of times, he'd drag this drunk guy into the woods, literally just drag him into the woods. And then he'd sober up. And then he was like a month blackout drunk, and now he's sobered up. And now, boom, back into life, back into being a knowledgeable, capable person. And because comfort's so available to us all, you almost have to force yourself into that situation, plan it out, "Okay, I'm going to go do that."

Lex Fridman

Do the hard thing.

Jordan Jonas

Do that hard thing and then deal with the consequences when I'm there.

Lex Fridman

What do you learn from that on the nature of happiness? What does it take to be happy?

Jordan Jonas

Happiness is interesting because it's complex and multifaceted. It includes a lot of things that are out of your control and a lot of things that are in your control. And it's quite the moving target in life, you know what I mean?

Lex Fridman

Yeah.

Jordan Jonas

So, one of the things that really impacted me when I was a young man, and I read *The Gulag Archipelago*, was don't pursue happiness because the ingredients to happiness can be taken from you outside of your control, your health, but pursue spiritual fullness, pursue, I think he words it duty, and then happiness may come alongside. Or it may not. So, he gives the example that I thought was really interesting. In the prison camps, everybody's trying to survive and they've made that their ultimate goal, "I will get through this." And they've all basically turned into animals in pursuit of that goal and lying and cheating and stealing. And then he was like, somehow the corrupt Orthodox Church produced these little babushkas who were candles in the middle of all this darkness because they did not allow their soul to get corrupted. And he is like, "What they did do is they died. They all died, but they were lights while they were alive, and lost their lives, but they didn't lose their souls." So, for myself, that was really powerful to read and realize that the pursuit of happiness wasn't exactly what I wanted to aim at. I wanted to aim at living out my life according to love, like we talked about earlier.

Lex Fridman

Trying to be that candle.

Jordan Jonas

Trying to be that candle. Yeah, make that your ideal. And then, in doing so, it was interesting. So, for me personally, my personal experience of that is I thought when I went to Russia that I gave up... in my 20s, I spent my whole 20s living in teepees and doing all this stuff that I thought, "I should give up getting a job, I should be pursuing a career, I should get an education of some sort. What am I doing for my future?" But I felt I knew where my purpose was, I knew what my calling was. I'm just going to do it. And it sounds glamorous now when I talk about it, but it sucked a lot of the times. And it was a lot of loneliness, a lot of giving up what I wanted, a lot of watching people I cared about. You put all this effort in, and then you just see the people that you put all this effort and just die and this and that, because that happened all the time. And then the other thing I thought I gave up was a relationship because you couldn't - I wasn't going to find a partner over there. And so, interestingly enough now in life, I can look back and be like, "Whoa, weird. Those two things I thought I gave up is where I've been almost provided for the most in life." Now, I have this career guiding people in the wilderness that I love. I genuinely love it. I find purpose in it. I know it's healthy and good for people. And then I have an amazing wife and an amazing family. How did that happen? But I didn't exactly aim at it. I consciously, in a way, I mean I hoped it was tangential, but I aimed at something else, which was those lessons I got from the Gulag Archipelago.

Lex Fridman

Just because you mentioned Gulag Archipelago, I got to go there. You have some suffering in your family history, whether it's the Armenian, Assyrian genocide or the Nazi occupation of France. Maybe, you could tell the story of that, the survival thing, it runs in your blood, it seems.

Jordan Jonas

I love history. I find so much richness in knowing what other people went through and find so much perspective in my own place in the world. I have the advantage of in my direct family, my grandparents, they went through the Armenian genocide. They were Assyrians. It was a Christian minority, indigenous people in the Middle East. They lived in Northwestern Iran. And during the chaos of World War I, the Ottoman empire was collapsing and it had all kinds of issues. And one of its issues was it had a big minority group and it thought it would be a good time to get rid of it. And they can justify it in all the ways you can, like, there's some people that were rebelling or this or that, but ultimately, it was just a big collective guilt and extermination policy against the Armenians and the Assyrians. And my grandparents, my grandma was 13 at the time, and my grandpa was 17, which is interesting. It happened almost 100 years ago, but my dad was born when my grandma was pretty old. But my grandmother, her dad was taken out to be shot. The Turks were coming in and

rounding up all the men, and they took them out to be shot. And then they took my grandma and her. She had seven brothers and sisters and her mom. And they drove her out into the desert, basically. Her dad got taken out to be shot. So, his name was Shaman Yumara, whatever, took him out. They were all tied up, all shot, needs to say a quick prayer before they shot him. But he fell down and he found he wasn't hit. And usually, of course, they'd come up and stab everybody or finish them off, but there was some kind of an alarm, and all the soldiers rushed off and he found himself in the bodies and was able to untie himself. They were naked and hungry and all that. And he ran out there, escaped, went into a building and found the loaf of bread wrapped in a shirt and was able to escape, fled. He never saw his family for... so, to continue the story, my grandma got taken with her mother and brothers and sisters. They just drove them into the desert until they died, basically, and run them around in circles and this and that, and then all the raping and pillaging that accompanies it. And at one point, her mom had the baby and the baby died. And her mom just collapsed and said, "I just can't go any further." And my grandma and her sister picked her up to, "We got to keep going," and picked her up. They left the baby along with the other. Everybody else had died. It was just the three of them left. And somehow, they bumbled across this British military camp and were rescued. Neither of the sister nor my great-grandmother ever really recovered, from what I understand, but my grandma did. At the same time, in another village in Iran there, the Turks came in and were burning down my grandpa's village and they caught. And my grandpa's dad was in a wheelchair and he had some money belt and he stuffed all his money in it and gave it to grandpa and just told him to run and don't turn back. And they came in the front door as he was running out the back, and he never saw his dad again. But he turned around and saw the house on fire, never knew what happened to his sister. And so, he was just alone. He ran. At some point, I can't remember, he lost his money belt and he took his jacket off, forgot it was something happened. Anyway, so he was in a refugee camp. He ended up getting taken in by some Jesuit missionary. So, anyway, both of them had lost basically everything. And then, at some point, they met in Baghdad, started a family, immigrated to France. And then it just so happened to be right before World War II. And so, the Nazis invaded. My aunt, she's still alive, but she actually met a resistance fighter for the French under a bridge somewhere. And they fell in love, and she got married. So, she had an inn on the French resistance at one point. And of course, they were all hungry. They'd recently immigrated, but also had this Nazi occupation and all that. And so, Uncle Joe, the resistance fighter guy, told him, like, "Hey, we're going to storm this noodle factory, come." And so, they stormed the noodle factory and all my aunts surrounding there and we're throwing out noodles into wheelbarrows and everybody was running. And then the Nazis came back and took it back over and shot a bunch of people and everything. And grandpa, he had already come from where he came from, was paranoid. So, he buried all the noodles out in the garden. And then my two aunts got stuck in that factory overnight with all the Nazi guards or whatever. And then the Nazi guards went all from house to house to find everybody that had had noodles and punish them. But they didn't find my grandpa's, fortunately. They searched his house, but not the garden. So, they had noodles. And somehow, it must've been in the same factory

or something, but olive oil, and they just lived off of that for all the whole war years. My aunts ended up getting out of the... they hid behind boxes and crates overnight and stuff, and the resistance stormed again in the morning and they got away and stuff. But anyway, chaos. So, when they moved to America, I will say, the most patriotic family everywhere ever, they loved it. It was paradise here.

Lex Fridman

I mean, that's a lot to go through. What lessons do you draw from that on perseverance?

Jordan Jonas

Look, I'm just one generation away from all that suffering. My aunts and uncles and dad and stuff were the kids of these people. And somehow, I don't have that. What happened to all that trauma? Somehow, my grandparents bore it, and then they were able to build a family, but not just a family but a happy family. I knew all my aunts and uncles and I didn't know them. They died before me. But it was so much joy. The family reunions were the best thing ever at the Jonases. And it's just like, how in one generation did you go from that to that? And it must have been a great sacrifice of some sort to not pass that much resentment. What did they do to break that chain in one generation?

Lex Fridman

Do you think it works the other way, like, where their ability to escape genocide, to escape Nazi occupation gave them a gratitude for life?

Jordan Jonas

Oh, yeah.

Lex Fridman

It's not a trauma in the sense like you're forever bearing it. The flip side of that is just gratitude to be alive when you know so many people did not survive.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, it must be, because the only footage I saw of my grandma was they were all the kids and stuff. And they were cooking up a rabbit that they were raising or whatever. But a joyful woman, you could see it in her. And she must've understood how fortunate she was and been so grateful for it and so thankful for every one of those 11 kids she had. So, I recognized it again in my dad. My dad went through a really slow painful decline in his health. And he had diabetes, ended up losing one leg. And so, he lost his job. He had to watch my mom go to school. All he wanted to do was be a provider and be a family man. I bet the best time in his life was when his kids ran to him and gave him a hug. But then, all of a sudden, he found himself in a position where he couldn't work and he had to watch his wife go to school, which was really hard for her, and become the breadwinner for the family. And he just felt a failure. And I watched him go through that. After all these years of letting that foot heal, we

went out first day and we were splitting firewood with the splitter. And he was just, "So good to be back out, Jordan. It's so nice." And he crushed his foot in the log splitter and you're just like, "No." And so, then they just amputated it. We've got both legs amputated, and then his health continued to decline. He lost his movement in his hands. So, he was incapacitated, to a degree, and in a lot of pain. I would hear him at night in pain all the time. And I delayed a trip back to Russia and just stayed with my dad for those last six months. And it was so interesting, having had lost everything. I've watched him wrestle with it through the years, but then he found his joy and his purpose just in being almost, I mean, a vegetable. I'd have to help him pee, roll him onto the cot, take him to dialysis. But we would laugh. I'd hear him at night crying or in pain, like, "Ah." And then in the morning he'd have encouraging words to say. And I was like, "Wow, that's how you face loss and suffering." And he must've gotten that somehow from his parents. And then I find myself on this show, and I had a thought, "Why is this easy to me," in a way? "Why is this thing that's..." and it just felt like this gift that had handed down and now would be my duty to hand down. But it's an interesting...

Lex Fridman

And be the beacon of that, represent that perseverance in the simpler way that something like survival in the wilderness shows. It's the same. It rhymes.

Jordan Jonas

It rhymes, and it's so simple. The lessons are simple, and so we can take them and apply them.

Lex Fridman

So, that's on the survivor side. What about on the people committing the atrocities? What do you make of the Ottomans, what they did to Armenians or the Nazis, what they did to the Jews, the Slavs, and basically everyone? Why do you think people do evil in this world?

Jordan Jonas

It's interesting that it is really easy, right? It's really easy. You can almost sense it in yourself to justify a little bit of evil, or you see yourself cheer a little bit when the enemy gets knocked back in some way. In a way, it's just perfectly naturalist for us to feed that hate and feed that tribalism in group outgroup, "We're on this team." And I think that can happen... I think it just happens slowly, one justification at a time, one step at a time. You hear something and it makes you think then that you are in the right to perform some kind of... you're justified and break a couple eggs to make an omelet type thing. But all of a sudden, that takes you down this whole train to where, pretty soon, you're justifying what's completely unjustifiable.

Lex Fridman

Which is gradual.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

It's a gradual process, a little bit at a time.

Jordan Jonas

I think that's why, for me, having a path of faith works as a mooring because it can help me shine that light on myself. It's like something outside. If you're just looking at yourself and looking within yourself for your compass in life, it's really easy to get that thing out of whack. But you need a perspective from what you can step out of yourself and look into yourself and judge yourself accordingly. Am I walking in line with that ideal? And I think without that check, you're subject. It's easy to ignore the fact that you might be able to commit those things. But we live in a pretty easy, comfortable society. What if you pictured yourself in the position of my grandparents and then, all of a sudden, you got the upper hand in some kind of a fight? What are you going to do? You'd definitely picture becoming evil in that situation.

Lex Fridman

I think one thing faith in God can do is humble you before these kinds of complexities of the world. And humility is a way to avoid the slippery slope towards evil, I think. Humility that you don't know who the good guys and the bad guys are, and you defer that to bigger powers to try to understand that.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah.

Lex Fridman

I think there's a lot of the atrocities were committed with people who are very sure of themselves being good.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, that's so true.

Lex Fridman

It is sad that religion is, at times, used as a way to as yet another tool for justification.

Jordan Jonas

Exactly, yeah.

Lex Fridman

Which is a sad application of religion.

Jordan Jonas

It really is. It's so inherent and so natural in us to justify ourselves. Just understanding history, read history, it blows my mind that, and I'm super thankful that, somehow, and this has been misused so much, but somehow this ideology arose that love your enemies, forgive those that persecute you, and just on down the line that something like that rose in the world into a position where we all accept those ideals, I think, is really remarkable and worth appreciating. That said, a lot of that gets wrapped up in what is so natural. It just becomes another instrument for tribalism or another justification for wrong. And so, I even myself, am self-conscious sometimes talking about matters of faith, because I know when I'm talking about something else than what someone else might think of when they hear me talking about it. So, it's interesting.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I've been listening to Jordan Peterson talk about this. He has a way of articulating things, which are sometimes hard to understand in the moment, but when I read it carefully afterwards, it starts to make more sense. I've heard him talk about religion and God as a base layer, like a metaphorical substrate from which morality of our sense of what is right and wrong comes from, and just our conceptions of what is beautiful in life, all these kinds of higher things that are fuzzy to understand, that their religion helps create this substrate for which we, as a species, as a civilization, can come up with these notions. And without it, you are lost at sea. I guess for him, morality requires that substrate.

Jordan Jonas

Like you said, it's kind of fuzzy. So, I've only been able to get clear vision of it when I live it. It's not something you profess or anything like that. It's something that you take seriously and apply in your life. And when you live it, then there's some clarity there, but that it has to be defined. And that's where you come in with the religion and the stories, because if you leave it completely undefined, I don't really know where you go from there. Actually isn't a funny to speak to that. I did mushroom. Have you ever done those before?

Lex Fridman

Mhmm. Mushrooms, yeah.

Jordan Jonas

I've done them a couple of times, but one time was, didn't do that many the other time more. And I had a really experience in helping couch all this in a proper context for myself. So, when I did it, I remember I was sitting on a swing and I could see everything was so blissful, except I could see my black hands on these chains on the swing, but everything else was blissful and amorphous, and I could see the outline of my kids and I could just feel the love for them. And I was just like, "Man, I just feel the love. It's so wonderful." But then, at times, I would try to picture them, and I couldn't quite picture the kids, but I could feel the love. And then I started asking all the deepest existential questions I could, and it felt like I was just

one answer, another answer, another answer. Everything was being answered. And I felt like I was communing with God, whatever you want to say. But I was very aware of the fact that that communing was just peeling back the tiniest corner of the infinite, and it just dumped me with every answer I felt I could have. And it blew me away. So, then I asked it, "Well, if You're the infinite, why did You reveal to me yourself? Why did You use the story of Jesus to reveal yourself?" And then that infinite amorphous thing had to, somehow, take form for us to be able to relate to it. It had to have some kind of a form. But whenever you create a form out of something, you're boxing it in and subjugating it to boundaries and stuff like that. And then that subject to pain and subject to the brokenness and all that. And I was like, "Oh, wow." But when I had that thought, then, all of a sudden, I could relate my dark hands on the chains to the rest of the experience, and then all of a sudden I could picture my children as the children rather than this amorphous feeling of love. It was like, "Oh, there's Alana and Alta and Zion." But then they were bounded, and then once they're bounded, you're subject to the death and to the misunderstanding and to all that. I picture the amoeba or the cell, and then when it dies, it turns into a unformed thing. So, we need some kind of form to relate to. So, instead of always just talking about God completely and tangibly, it gave me a way to relate to it. And I was like, "Wow, that was really powerful to me," and putting it in a context that was applicable.

Lex Fridman

But ultimately, God is the thing that's formless, that is unbounded, but we humans need.

Jordan Jonas

Right.

Lex Fridman

I mean, that's the purpose of stories. They resonate with something in, but when you need the bounded nature, the constraints of those stories, otherwise we wouldn't be able to -

Jordan Jonas

Can't relate to it.

Lex Fridman

We can't relate to it. And then when you look at the stories literally, or you just look at them just as they are, it seems silly, just too simplistic.

Jordan Jonas

Right. And then that was always, a lot of my family and loved ones and friends have completely left the faith. And I totally, in a way, I get it. I understand, but I also really see the baby that's being thrown out with the bathwater. And I want to cherish that, in a way, I guess.

Lex Fridman

And it's interesting that you say that the way to know what's right and wrong is you have to live it. Sometimes, it's probably very difficult to articulate. But in the living of it, do you realize it?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah. And I'm glad you say that because I've found a lot of comfort in that, because I feel somewhat inarticulate a lot of the times and unable to articulate my thoughts, especially on these matters. And then you just think it's, "I just have to." I can live it. I can try to live it. And then what I also am struck with right away is I can't, because you can't love everybody, you can't love your enemies, and you can't... But placing that in front of you as the ideal is so important to put a check on your human instincts, on your tribalism, on your... I mean, very quickly, like we were talking about with evil, it can really quickly take its place in your life, you almost won't observe it happening. And so, I much appreciate all the me striving. I grew up in a Christian family, so I had these cliches that I didn't really understand, like a relationship with God, what does that mean? But then I realized, when I struggled with trying, with taking... I actually did try to take it seriously and struggle with what does it mean to live out of life of love in the world? But that's a wrestling match. It's not that simple. It sounds good, but it's really hard to do. And then you realize you can't do it perfectly. But in that struggle, in that wrestling match is where I actually sense that relationship. And then that's where it gains life and how that... and I'm sure that relates to what Jordan Peterson is getting at in his metaphor.

Lex Fridman

In the striving of the ideal, in the striving towards the ideal, you discover how to be a better person.

Jordan Jonas

One thing I noticed really tangibly on alone was that, because I had so many people that were close to me, just leave it all together, I was like, "I could do that. I actually understand why they do, or I could not. I do have a choice." And so, I had to choose at that point to maintain that ideal because I could add enough time on alone. One nice thing is you don't have any distractions. You have all the time in the world to go into your head. And I could play those paths out in my life. And not only in my life, but I feel like societally and generationally. I throw it all away and everybody start from square one, or we can try to redeem what's valuable in this and wrestle with it. And so, I chose that path.

Lex Fridman

Well, I do think it's like a wrestling match. You mentioned Gulag Archipelago. I'm very much a believer that we all have the capacity for good and evil. And striving for the ideal to be a good human being is not a trivial one. You have to find the right tools for yourself to be able to be the candle, as you mentioned before.

Jordan Jonas

Mmhmm. I like that.

Lex Fridman

And then for that, religion and faith can help. I'm sure there's other ways, but I think it's grounded in understanding that each human is able to be a really bad person and a really good person. And that's a choice. It's a deliberate choice. And it's a choice that's taken every moment and builds up over time. And the hard part about it's you don't know. You don't always have the clarity using reason to understand what is good and what is right and what is wrong. You have to live it with humility and constantly struggle. Because then, yeah, you might wake up on a society where you're committing genocides and you think you're the good guys. And I think you have to have the courage to realize you're not. It's not always obvious.

Jordan Jonas

It isn't, man.

Lex Fridman

History has the clarity to show who were the good guys and who were the bad guys.

Jordan Jonas

Right. You got to wrestle with it. It's like, that quote, the line between good and evil goes through the heart of every man, and we push it this way and that. And our job is to work on that within ourselves.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that's the part. That's what I like. The full quote talks about the fact that it moves. The line moves moment by moment, day by day. We have the freedom to move that line. So, it is a very deliberate thing. It's not like you're born this way and it's it.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, I agree.

Lex Fridman

And especially in conditions that are worn peace, in the case of the camps, absurd levels of injustice, in the face of all that, when everything is taken away from you, you still have the choice to be the candle like the grandmas. By the way, grandmas, in all parts of the world, are the strongest humans.

Jordan Jonas

Shout-out. Seriously, yeah.

Lex Fridman

I don't know what it is. I don't know. They have this wisdom that comes from patience and have seen it all, have seen all the bullshit of the people that come and gone, all the abuses of power, all of this, I don't know what it is. And they just keep going.

Jordan Jonas

Right, right. Yeah, that's so true.

Lex Fridman

As we've gotten a bit philosophical, what do you think of Werner Herzog's style of narration? I wish he narrated my life.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, it's amazing to have listened to.

Lex Fridman

Because that documentary is actually in Russian. I think he took a longer series and then put narration over it. And that narration can transform a story.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, he does an incredible job with it. Have you seen the full version? Have you watched the four-part full version? You should. You'd like it. It's in Russian, and so you'll get the fullness of that. And he had to fit it into a two-hour format. So, I think what you lose in those extra couple hours is worth watching. I think you'll like it.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, they always go pretty dark.

Jordan Jonas

Do they?

Lex Fridman

They always go pretty dark.

Jordan Jonas

Do they?

Lex Fridman

He has a very dark sense about nature that is violence and it's murder.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, I think that's important to recognize because it's really easy, I mean especially with what I do and what I talk about, and I see so much of the value in nature. Gosh, I also see a beautiful moose and a calf running around, and then next week I see the calf ripped the shreds by wolves and you're just like, "Oh." And it's not as Rousseauian as we like to think. Things must die for things to live, like you said. And that's just played out all the time. And it's indifferent to you, doesn't care if you live or die, and doesn't care how you die or how much pain you go through while you... It's pretty brutal. So it's interesting that he taps into that, and I think it's valuable because it's easy to idealize in a way.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, the indifference is... I don't know what to make of it. There is an indifference. It's a bit scary, it's a bit lonely. You're just a cog in the machine of nature that doesn't really care about you.

Jordan Jonas

Totally. I think that's something I sat with a lot on that show, is another part of the depths of your psychology to delve into. And that's when I thought I understand that deeply, but I could also choose to believe that for some reason it matters, and then I could live like it matters, and then I could see the trajectories. And that was another fork in the road of my path, I guess.

Lex Fridman

What do you think about the connection to the animals? So in that movie, it's with the dogs. And with you it's the other domesticated, the reindeer. What do you think about that human animal connection?

Jordan Jonas

In the context of that indifference, isn't it interesting that we assign so much value, and love, and appreciation for these animals? And in some degree we get that back in a... I think right now you just said the reindeer. I think of the one they gave me because he was long and tall, so they named him [inaudible 02:18:16], and I just remember [inaudible 02:18:19], and just watching him eat the leaves, and go with me through the woods, and trust him to take me through rivers and stuff. And it really is special. It's really enriching to have that relationship with an animal. And I think it also puts you in a proper context. One thing I noticed about the natives who live with those animals all the time is they relate to life and death a little more naturally. We feel really removed from it, particularly in urban settings. And I think when you interact with animals, and you have to confront the life and the death of them and the responsibility of a symbiotic relationship you have, I think it opens it a little bit awareness to your place in the puzzle, and puts you in it rather than above it.

Lex Fridman

Have you been able to accept your own death?

Jordan Jonas

I wonder. You wonder when it actually comes, what you're going to think. But I did have my dad to watch, confronted in as positive a manner as you could. And that's a big advantage. And so I think when the time comes that I will be ready, but I think that's easy to say when the time feels far off. It'll be interesting if you got a cancer diagnosis tomorrow and stage four. It'll be heavy.

Lex Fridman

Did you ever confront death while in survival situations when you're in?

Jordan Jonas

I had a time where I thought I was going to die. I had a lot of situations that could have gone either way, and a lot of injuries, broken ribs and this and that. But the one that I was able to be conscious through a slowly evolving experience that I thought I might die in was at one point, we were siphoning gas out of a barrel, and it was almost to the bottom, and I was sucking really hard to get the gas out. And then I didn't get the siphon going, so I waited. And then while I was sitting there, [inaudible 02:20:21] put a new canister on top and put the hose in, and I didn't see. And so then I went to get another siphon and I went, sucked as hard as I could, and just instantly a bunch of gas filled my mouth, and I couldn't spit it out. I had to go like that, and I just mouthful of gas that I just drank and I was just like, "What is that going to do?" And he and my friend, were going to go on this fishing trip, and so was I. And I was just like, "I might just stay." And I was in this little Russian village and they're like, "All right, well." [inaudible 02:20:57] was like, "Man, I had a buddy that died doing that with diesel a couple of years ago. Man." So anyway, I made my way to the hospital, and by then you're really out of it. And they put me in this little dark room. It almost sounds unrealistic, but it's exactly how it happened. They put me in a little room with a toilet, and they gave me a galvanized bucket, and then they just had a cold water faucet and they're just like, "Just chug water, puke into the toilet, and just flush your system as much you can." But they only had a cold water faucet. So I was just sitting there like chug, chug, chug, until you puke, and chug until you puke, and I'm in the dark. And I started to shiver, because I was so cold, but I just had to still get this thing up to me and chug until I puked. I was picturing, I remember reading about the Japanese torture where they would put a hose in somebody and then make them drink water until they puke. Anyway, and I just felt so... The only way I can express it, I felt so possessed, demon possessed. I was just permeated with gas. I could feel it was coming out of my pores, and I wanted to rip it out of me and I couldn't. I'd puke into the toilet and then couldn't see, but I was wondering if it was rain. And then I just remember, I could tell I was going out pretty soon, and I remember looking at my hands up close. I'd see them a little bit and I was like, "Oh, that's how dad's hands looked." They were alive, alive, and then interesting. Are my hands going to look like that and a few minutes or whatever. So

then I wrote down to my family what I thought, "I love you all. I feel at peace," blah, blah, blah. And then I passed out and I woke up. But I didn't think... I actually thought, when I went to pass out, I thought there was a coin toss for me. So I really felt like I was confronting the end there.

Lex Fridman

What are the harshest conditions to survive in on earth?

Jordan Jonas

Well, there are places that are just purely uninhabitable. But I think as far as places that you have a chance -

Lex Fridman

You have a chance is a good way to put it.

Jordan Jonas

Maybe Greenland. I think of Greenland because I think of those Vikings that settled, there were rugged capable dudes and they didn't make it. But there are Inuit, natives that live up there, but it's a hard life and the population's never grown very big, because you're scraping by up there. And you picture, and the Vikings that did land there, they just weren't able to quite adapt. The fact that they all died out is just a symbol to that must be a pretty difficult place to live.

Lex Fridman

What would you say? That's primarily because just the food sources are limited.

Jordan Jonas

The food sources are limited, but the fact that some people can live there means it is possible. They've figured out ways to catch seals and do things to survive, but it's by no means easier to be taken for granted or obvious. I think it's probably a harsh place to try to live.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's fascinating not just humans, but to watch how animals have figured out how to survive. I was watching a documentary on polar bears. They just figure out a way, and they've been doing it for generations, and they figure out a way. They travel hundreds of miles to the water to get fat, and they travel 100 miles for whatever other purpose because they want to stay on the ice. I don't know. But there's a process, and they figure it out against the long odds, and some of them don't make it.

Jordan Jonas

It's incredible. What tough things, man. You just think every animal you see up in the mountains when I'm up in the woods, there's that thing just surviving through the winter, scraping by. It's tough existence.

Lex Fridman

What do you think it would take to break you, let's say mentally? If you're in a survival situation.

Jordan Jonas

I mean I think mentally it would have to be... Well, we talked about that earlier I guess. The thing that I've confronted that I thought I knew was that if I knew I was the last person on earth, I wouldn't do it. But maybe you're right. Maybe I would think I wasn't. But I think I can't imagine. We're so blessed in the time we live, but I can't imagine what it's like to lose your kids, something like that. It was an experience that was so common for humanity for so much of history. Would I be able to endure that? I would have at least a legacy to look back on of people who did, but god forbid I ever have to delve that deep. You know what I mean? I could see that breaking somebody.

Lex Fridman

In your own family history, there's people who have survived that, and maybe that would give you hope.

Jordan Jonas

I mean I think that's what I would have to somehow hold onto.

Lex Fridman

But in a survival situation, there's very few things that -

Jordan Jonas

I don't know what it would be. So I'm alone. So if I'm alone, I knew, and ultimately it is a game show. So it's like ultimately, I wasn't going to kill myself out there. So if I hadn't been able to procure food, and I was starving to death, it's like, okay, I'm going to go home. But if you put yourself in that situation, but it's not a game show, and having been there to some degree, I will say I wasn't even close. I don't even know. It hadn't pushed my mental limit at all yet I would say or on the scale, but that's not to say there isn't one. I know there is one, but I have a hard time... I know I've dealt with enough pain and enough discomfort in life that I know I can deal with that. I think it gets difficult when there's a way out, and you start to wonder if you shouldn't take the way out as far as if there's no way out, I don't know -

Lex Fridman

Oh, that's interesting. I mean that is a real difficult battle when there's an exit, when it's easy to quit.

Jordan Jonas

Right. "Why am I doing this?"

Lex Fridman

Yeah, that's the thing that gets louder and louder the harder things get, that voice.

Jordan Jonas

It's not insignificant. If you think you're doing permanent damage to your body, you would be smart to quit. You should just not do that when it's not necessary, because health is kind of all you have in some regards. So I don't blame anyone when they quit because of that reason. It's like good. But if you're in a situation and you don't have the option to quit, is knowing that you're doing permanent, that's not going to break. That won't break me. You just have to get through it. I'm not sure what my mental limit would be outside of the family suffering in the way that I described earlier.

Lex Fridman

When it's just you, it's you alone. There's the limit. You don't know what the limit is.

Jordan Jonas

I don't know.

Lex Fridman

Injuries, physical stuff is annoying though. That could be -

Jordan Jonas

Isn't it weird how, I can have a good life, happy life, and then you have a bad back or you have a headache. And it's amazing how much that can overwhelm your experience. And again, that was something I saw in dad that was interesting. How can you find joy in that when you're just steeped in that all the time? And people, I'm sure listening, there's a lot of people that do, and talk about the cross to bear, and the hero journey to be good for you for trying to find your way through that. There was a lady in Russia, Tanya, and she had cancer and recovered, but always had a pounding headache, and she was really joyful, and really fun to be around. And I'm just like, man, you just have to have a really bad headache for today to know how much that throws a wrench in your existence. So all that to say if you're not right now suffering with blindness or a bad back, it's like just count your blessings because it's amazing how complex we are, how well our bodies work. And when they go out of whack, it can be very overwhelming. And they all will at some point. And so that's an interesting thing to think ahead on how you're going to confront it. It does keep you humble, like you said.

Lex Fridman

It's inspiring that people figure out a way. With migraines, that's a hard one though. You have headaches...

Jordan Jonas

It's so hard.

Lex Fridman

Oh man, because those can be really painful.

Jordan Jonas

It's overwhelming.

Lex Fridman

And dizzying and all of this. That's inspiring. That's inspiring that she found -

Jordan Jonas

There's not nothing in that. I mean, somehow you can tap into purpose even in that pain. I guess I would just speak from my dad's experience. I saw somebody do it and I benefited from it. So thanks to him for seeing the higher calling there.

Lex Fridman

You wrote a note on your blog. In 2012, you spent five weeks-ish in the forest alone. I just thought it was interesting, because this is in contrast to on the show *Alone*, you are really alone, you're not talking to anybody. And you realize that, you write, "I remember at one point, after several weeks had passed, I wandered into a particular beautiful part of the woods and exclaimed out loud, 'Wow.' It struck me that it was the first time I had heard my own voice in several weeks, with no one to talk to." Did your thoughts go into some deep place?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, I would say my mental life was really active. When you're that long alone, I'll tell you what you won't have is any skeletons in your closet that are still in your closet. You will be forced to confront every person... I mean it's one thing if you've cheated on your wife or something, but you'll be confronted with the random dude you didn't say thank you to and the issue that you didn't resolve. All this stuff that was long gone will come up, and then you'll work through it, and you'll think how you should make it right. I had a lot of those thoughts while I was out there, and it was so interesting to see what you would just brush over and confront it. Because in our modern world, when you're always distracted, you're just never ever going to know until you take the time to be alone for a considerable amount of time.

Lex Fridman

Spend time hanging out with the skeletons?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, exactly. I recommend it.

Lex Fridman

So you said you guide people. What are your favorite places to go to?

Jordan Jonas

Well if I tell them, then is everybody going to go there?

Lex Fridman

I like how you actually have... It might be a YouTube video or your Instagram post where you give them a recommendation of the best fishing hole in the world, and you give detailed instructions how to get there, but it's like a Lord of the Rings type of journey.

Jordan Jonas

Right, right. No, I love the... There's a region that I definitely love in the states. It's special to me. I grew up there, stuff like that. Idaho, Wyoming, Montana, those are really cool places to me. The small town vibes they're still maintaining and stuff there.

Lex Fridman

A mix of mountains and forests?

Jordan Jonas

Mmhmm. But you know, another really awesome place that blew my mind was New Zealand. That south island of New Zealand was pretty incredible. As far as just stunning stuff to see, that was pretty high up there on the list. But all these places have such unique things about Canada. Where they did Alone, it's not typically what you'd say, because it's fairly flat, and cliffy, and stuff. But it really became beautiful to me because I could tap into the richness of the land or the fishing hole thing. It was like that's a special little spot, something like that. And you see beauty and then you start to see the beauty in the smaller scale like, "Look at that little meadow that it's got an orange, and a pink, and a blue flower right next to each other. That's super cool." And there's a million things like that.

Lex Fridman

Have you been back there yet, back to where the Alone show was?

Jordan Jonas

No, we're going back this summer. I'm going to take guided trip up there, take a bunch of people. I'm really looking forward to being able to enjoy it without the pressure. It's going to be a fun trip.

Lex Fridman

What advice would you give to people in terms of how to be in nature, so hikes to take or journeys to take out of nature where it could take you to that place where the busyness and the madness of the world can dissipate and you can be with it? How long does it take for you for people usually to just -

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, I think you need a few days probably to really tap into it, but maybe you need to work your way there. It's awesome to go out on a hike, go see some beautiful little waterfall, or go see some old tree, or whatever it is. But I think just doing it, everybody thinks about doing it. You just really do it, go out. And then plan to go overnight. Don't be so afraid of all the potentialities that you delay it inevitably. It's actually one of the things that I've enjoyed the most about guiding people, is giving them the tools so that now they have this ability into the future. You can go out and feel like, "I'm going to pick this spot on the map and go there." And that's a tool in your toolkit of life that is I think really valuable, because I think everybody should spend some time in nature. I think it's been pretty proven healthy.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, I mean camping is great. And solo, I got a chance to do it solo, is pretty cool.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, that's cool you did.

Lex Fridman

Yeah, it's cool. And I recorded stuff too. That helped.

Jordan Jonas

Oh good. Yeah.

Lex Fridman

So you sit there and you record the thoughts. Actually for having to record the thoughts, it forced me to really think through what I was feeling to convert the feelings into words, which is not a trivial thing because it's mostly just feeling. You feel a certain kind of way.

Jordan Jonas

That's interesting. I felt like the way I met my wife was we met at this wedding, and then I went to Russia basically, and we kept in touch via email for that year. And a similar thing. It

was really interesting to have to be so thoughtful and purposeful about what you're saying and things. I think it's probably a healthy, good thing to do.

Lex Fridman

What gives you hope about this whole thing we have going on, the future of human civilization?

Jordan Jonas

If we talked about gratitude earlier, look at what we have now. That could give you hope. Look at the world we're in. We live in such an amazing time with -

Lex Fridman

Buildings and roads.

Jordan Jonas

Buildings and roads, and food security. And I lived with the natives and I thought to myself a lot, "I wonder if not everybody would choose this way of life," because there's something really rich about just that small group, your direct relationship to your needs, all that. But with the food security and the modern medicine, the things that we now have that we take for granted, but that I wouldn't choose that life if we didn't have those things, because otherwise you're going to watch your family starve to death or things like that. So we have so much now, which should lead us to be hopeful while we try to improve, because there's definitely a lot of things wrong. But I guess there's a lot of room for improvement, and I do feel like we're sort of walking on a knife's edge, but I guess that's the way it is.

Lex Fridman

As the tools we build become more powerful?

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, exactly. Knife is getting sharper and sharper. I'll argue with my brother about that. Sometimes he takes the more positive view and I'm like, "I mean it's great. We've done great," but man, more and more people with nuclear weapons and more... It's just going to take one mistake with the more power.

Lex Fridman

I think there's something about the sharpness of the knife's edge that gets humanity to really focus, and step up, and not screw it up. There is just like you said with the, cold going out into the extreme cold, it wakes you up. And I think it's the same thing when nuclear weapons, it just wakes up humanity.

Jordan Jonas

Not everybody was half asleep.

Lex Fridman

Exactly. And then we keep building more and more powerful things to make sure we stay awake.

Jordan Jonas

Yeah, exactly. Stay awake, see what we've done, be thankful for it, but then improve it. And then of course, I appreciated your little post the other week when you said you wanted some kids. That's a very direct way to relate to the future and to have hope for the future.

Lex Fridman

I can't wait. And hopefully, I also get a chance to go out in the wilderness with you at some point.

Jordan Jonas

I would love it.

Lex Fridman

That'd be fun.

Jordan Jonas

Open invite. Let's make it happen. I got some really cool spots I have in mind to take you.

Lex Fridman

Awesome. Let's go. Thank you for talking today, brother. Thank you for everything you stand for.

Jordan Jonas

Thanks man.

Lex Fridman

Thanks for listening to this conversation with Jordan Jonas. To support this podcast, please check out our sponsors in the description. And now, let me try a new thing where I try to articulate some things I've been thinking about, whether prompted by one of your questions or just in general. If you'd like to submit a question including in audio and video form, go to lexfridman.com/ama. Now allow me to comment on the attempted assassination of Donald Trump on July 13th. First, as I've posted online, wishing Donald Trump good health after an assassination attempt is not a partisan statement. It's a human statement. And I'm sorry if some of you want to categorize me and other people into blue and red bins. Perhaps you do it because it's easier to hate than to understand. In this case it shouldn't matter. But let me say once again that I am not right-wing nor left-wing. I'm not partisan. I make up my mind one issue at a time, and I try to approach everyone and every idea with empathy and with an open mind. I have and will continue to have many long-form

conversations with people both on the left and the right. Now onto the much more important point, the attempted assassination of Donald Trump should serve as a reminder that history can turn on a single moment. World War I started with the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand. And just like that, one moment in history on June 18th, 1914 led to the death of 20 million people, half of whom were civilians. If one of the bullets on July 13th had a slightly different trajectory, where Donald Trump would end up dying in that small town in Pennsylvania, history would write a new dramatic chapter, the contents of which all the so-called experts and pundits would not be able to predict. It very well could have led to a civil war, because the true depth of the division in the country is unknown. We only see the surface turmoil on social media and so on. And it is events like the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand where we as a human species get to find out what the truth is of where people really stand. The task then is to try and make our society maximally resilient and robust as such to stabilizing events. The way to do that, I think, is to properly identify the threat, the enemy. It's not the left or the right that are the "enemy," extreme division itself is the enemy. Some division is productive. It's how we develop good ideas and policies, but too much leads to the spread of resentment and hate that can boil over into destruction on a global scale. So we must absolutely avoid the slide into extreme division. There are many ways to do this, and perhaps it's a discussion for another time. But at the very basic level, let's continuously try to turn down the temperature of the partisan bickering and more often celebrate our obvious common humanity. Now let me also comment on conspiracy theories. I've been hearing a lot of those recently. I think they play an important role in society. They ask questions that serve as a check on power and corruption of centralized institutions. The way to answer the questions raised by conspiracy theories is not by dismissing them with arrogance and feigned ignorance, but with transparency and accountability. In this particular case, the obvious question that needs an honest answer is, why did the Secret Service fail so terribly in protecting the former president? The story we're supposed to believe is that a 20-year-old untrained loner was able to outsmart the Secret Service by finding the optimal location on a roof for a shot on Trump from 130 yards away, even though the Secret Service snipers spotted him on the roof 20 minutes before the shooting and did nothing about it. This looks really shady to everyone. Why does it take so long to get to a full accounting of the truth of what happened? And why is the reporting of the truth concealed by corporate government speak? Cut the bullshit. What happened? Who fucked up and why? That's what we need to know. That's the beginning of transparency. And yes, the director of the US Secret Service should probably step down or be fired by the president, and not as part of some political circus that I'm sure is coming. But as a step towards uniting an increasingly divided and cynical nation. Conspiracy theories are not noise, even when they're false. They are a signal that some shady, corrupt, secret bullshit is being done by those trying to hold on to power. Not always, but often. Transparency is the answer here, not secrecy. If we don't do these things, we leave ourselves vulnerable to singular moments that turn the tides of history. Empires do fall, civil wars do break out, and tear apart the fabric of societies. This is a great nation, the most successful collective human experiment in the history of earth. And letting ourselves

become extremely divided risks destroying all of that. So please ignore the political pundits, the political grifters, clickbait media, outrage fueling politicians on the right and the left who try to divide us. We're not so divided. We're in this together. As I've said many times before, I love you all. This is a long comment. I'm hoping not to do comments this long in the future and hoping to do many more. So I'll leave it here for today, but I'll try to answer questions and make comments on every episode. If you would like to submit questions, like I mentioned, including audio and video form, go to lexfridman.com/ama, and now let leave you with some words from Ralph Waldo Emerson, "Adopt the pace of nature. Her secret is patience." Thank you for listening and hope to see you next time.