

Heather Vickery 0:01

Hi out there. This is Heather Vickery and you've tuned in to The Brave Files Podcast. Today, we're talking all about resilience. Resilience, my friends, is a learned behavior. And yes, some people are born with it. But most people learn it. It's defined in the dictionary as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties or being tough. It's also defined as the ability of a substance or an object to spring back into shape and have a plasticity. You know, sometimes I think as humans, we should learn to be a little bit more object like in this way, a little bit more willing to be elastic and spring back into shape. So I asked you this, my brave listener? How resilient are you? How quickly do you recover when things go wrong? Do you have the ability to spring back into shape? Well, this week's episode is all about learning to be resilient. And it's a story of hope. Author, coach and Arctic expedition guide and expert. Let's just pause for a minute to talk about how cool that is. Heather Thorkelson joins us to talk about growing up wealthy, but severely neglected. Neglect is not just for the underprivileged. And it's often overlooked because we just assume the wealthy are happy and well cared for. This is the story of learned resilience, and finding the strength that we need from within. As Heather puts it, most of our limitations are about how big we choose to dream. Speaking of dreams, have you ever dreamt about starting a podcast? If so, if you've even had an inkling of a thought, like I would really like to have a podcast one day or maybe you've been thinking about it and dreaming it and planning it in your head for ages. If you've ever thought about starting a podcast then I invite you to join me and the experts from the Podcast Power Academy. For a free live session today, which is Thursday, July 16, at 2pm Central, we are going to talk about all of the reasons this is a great time to start a podcast and exactly what you need to do to get started. It is a fun, live, engaging session. No slides, we're not showing you a PowerPoint presentation. We're just talking and answering all of your questions. All you have to do to join us is register and you can do that at podcastpoweracademy.com. Once you register, we send you the link. And if you miss us or you're not able to make it today, be sure to subscribe anyway so that we can let you know when the next live session is happening. I am really excited to see you there. I hope that you will be resilient enough to come and chat with us about the possibility of starting your very own podcast. So my friends, my brave listeners. Now I invite you to get something that you like to drink and get cozy and stay tuned. To learn all about the power of resilience.

Heather Thorkelson 3:04

resilience, self belief, and tenacity.

Heather Vickery 3:07

This is Heather Vickery and you're listening to The Brave Files, stories from people living courageously. When we choose bravely in big and small ways, it powerfully elevates our lives. I hope these stories connect with you and encourage you to embrace bravery in every possible way, day after day. Together, we can build a movement of courageous living that enriches both our lives and our communities. And if you enjoy the show, I asked you to please share it with others. Maybe think of someone who you want to choose bravely right alongside you. Thanks for tuning in. Now, here's the show. Hey, everybody, this is Heather Vickery. Welcome to this week's episode of the brave files podcast. You're going to be really, really glad you joined us today. Because it's the Battle of the Heather's it's awesome what's not really a battle we're collaborating. Today's guest basically raised herself while living in Costa Rica with her father who was an airline pilot, and she didn't speak Spanish. Heather Thorkelson says she had no choice except to choose herself again and again and again. And that's how she created the life she wanted, and grew past the difficulties of her childhood. She also reminds us that neglect sees no socio economic status, and that being neglected as a child or a young person is extremely difficult to deal with. But that resilience is in fact a superpower. Heather, welcome to The Brave Files.

Heather Thorkelson 4:41

Thank you so much for having me on the show.

Heather Vickery 4:44

I've been really looking forward to this. I was just telling you before we started recording that resilience is a word that I love and has just been presenting itself to me over and over and over again, tell me a little bit about what resilience means. To you?

Heather Thorkelson 5:01

Well, resilience is the reason why I'm why I'm still here. To be honest. I think resilience is one of the themes of my life. And I think probably a lot of people can relate to that just because I believe that life is not so easy. You know, I talked about this with a lot of people like it's not easy. Adulthood is hard, relationships are hard. Things in general are just not sort of a white picket fence. Everything's hunky dory, you know. And so, I'm, yeah, I'm quite glad in retrospect, as you said, I had to raise myself and that was extremely difficult, but it made me be able to face adulthood and all the slings and arrows of life with a greater degree of resiliency because I had no choice when I was younger, right like that muscle got built, whether I wanted it to or not, and now I'm able to bounce back from failures or disappointments or challenges. or whatever, so much faster than the average person. And I know that because of the people I'm surrounded with, you know, like my friends and family, I noticed that I'm the one who's like, right. Okay, we're back in action. Let's keep going faster than everyone else.

Heather Vickery 6:22

Do you think that is something you were born with? Or you learned it just because you had to? And then a follow up question to that is why do some people gain this skill of resilience during difficult childhoods or lived experiences? And others don't? And I'm asking you're not a scientist. We all know she's not a scientist.

This is the non scientific responses, just the lived experience. It's just a curious conversation.

Heather Thorkelson 6:42

Yeah, I don't really know whether or not I was born with some of this To be honest, because all I can tell you is that when I was a young child before my parents split up, and before I was taking care of myself, essentially I was an absolute basket case. I was very anxious. shy, huge introverts still am, like a very, very social introvert, you know. And I got, I was a complete, I was a mess. I was a hot mess of a kid. And I used to have stomach aches all the time, I used to burst out crying in school all the time. I mean, my home life wasn't good. So obviously, there were presentations of anxiety at a young age, but I wasn't a resilient kid, you know. And then, like, life circumstances changed. And I had to, as you said, in the intro, had to choose myself, I had to choose every day to show up for myself because nobody was showing up for me. So I built that muscle and maybe deep down there was a part of me that was just naturally resilient. And I didn't know it. And I tapped into that. I'm not sure. But you know, here we are now. Yeah. And yeah. The second question, remind me what your second question was.

Heather Vickery 7:51

Just what do you think could be the difference? And this is just theorizing, folks, in folks who learn the resilience like you And those who just don't, even though the you know, they just keep keep getting knocked down and they don't keep getting up, which I will say as a caveat, I think way more people do way more people are much, much stronger than they think they are. Yeah, but sometimes and or maybe you just feel that way if you're listening and you just feel like you keep getting knocked down and man, it hurts and it's hard and why can't you catch a break? Yeah, I don't

Heather Thorkelson 8:23

know. Yeah, you know, I mean, I think there's, I'm going to give you a really top level observation around this, and that is that some people choose to be victors and other ones are okay staying as a victim. And I don't mean okay, like they're like, I don't mind, but they don't know how they don't know how. So the default mode, the way that they cope is by staying in victim mode, because there is a payoff to being in victim mode. You know, people are there's, there's always every single behavior that we have. There's a reason for it. We're getting some kind of positive feedback loop. So But at some at whatever point in my teen years, when I was in the middle of this sort of becoming who I who I have become, I was like, I'm not dealing with this, you know, like, I'm not going to let this get me down, I am not going to let this get me down. I am going to do something with my life. I just felt this deep seated fire in me that the choices that other people had made my terrible choices for my parents were not going to ruin everything for me. And that's why I came out on the other side, not as a victim. And I was like, Nope, I decide. This is my life. self determination. Hundred percent.

Heather Vickery 9:36

Good for you. We have others. I'll tell you.

So you're How old were you when your parents divorced?

Heather Thorkelson 10:00

I was 10.

And in a very unusual This was in the early 80s. Right? I won't give your age away. But do I have that right? late? 80s. Actually late 80s. Okay, all right. Yeah, you're younger than me. It was very unusual then for fathers to get full custody of their kids.

Yeah, especially when there are three little girls who had been raised full time by their stay at home mother.

Heather Vickery 10:06

So Oh, wow, I didn't even realize you had siblings involved. In this, I guess it's maybe better than being completely alone. Where did you fall in the lineup? I'm the middle one, the middle one. All right. So I don't want to dwell on this too much. But I'm curious. How did you all end up with your dad? It's a very good question,

Heather Thorkelson 10:23

I think is a 1989 people were a bit stupid about stuff like this in terms of like the legal system and the small town that we were living in the long and the short of it is that my dad is a very, very clever sociopath. And he is a charming, charismatic airline pilot who can pull the wool over most people's eyes. And we were absolutely terrified of him. absolutely terrified of him. So it was easy for him to say, right girls, you're gonna come and live with me now. And we were like, okay, you know, and then my mom just didn't have the skills to be able to or the money to be able to stand up to him. And so she lost her three little girls, and we didn't see her for 10 years. Oh my gosh, that breaks my heart. I literally felt my heart like fall apart when you said that. Yeah, yeah, it was a crazy story. Like, I've actually thought about going back to the lawyers emailing them now 30 years later and saying So guys, what the hell, you know, like who was advocating for us because three girls going to live with a father who was only physically present in the country 50% of the time, you know, we were 7 10 and 14. And then after that, he separated us from not just our mom, but all of our extended family and friends. And then he eventually separated us from each other. So by the time I was living in Costa Rica, my little sister was there for a short period of time, but she completely went off the rails and got sent away to boarding school. So then I was alone.

Heather Vickery 11:43

Oh my gosh, that's horrifying. Yeah. And yeah, that that could happen. And you were Did you have contact with your mom at all?

Heather Thorkelson 11:51

No, nothing. There was no internet, you know, like there was no I wasn't even allowed to when we first moved to Costa Rica. I was 14. There was like long distance calls cost a lot of money. I wasn't allowed to even call all my old friends back home. I was completely isolated. And I had no lifelines or anything. And then my dad would leave and go do his piloting, you know, and I would just be taking care of myself in a foreign country. Getting the school and back, you know,

Heather Vickery 12:17

that's crazy,

Heather Thorkelson 12:19

Yeah.

Heather Vickery 12:20

Do you have a relationship with your mother now?

Heather Thorkelson 12:23

I do. Yeah. I do.

Heather Vickery 12:25

Goodness. I cannot imagine I'd like to interview your mom.

I'm really serious. I cannot imagine what that feels like and how you survive those 10 years. Yeah. Having someone steal your children from you? Yeah, it's pretty hideous. Oh my gosh, sorry. We're not here to talk about your mom. But that's

understandably not something we find when we look you up on the internet, Heather?

Heather Thorkelson 12:52

No, it's not. I mean, I am I am very open about this story because I think that there are probably so many more people out there who not To the same weird degree that I was, but people who have been isolated from loved ones and stuff. And you know, a lot of us go through this kind of stuff. And I think the more we talk about it, the more it feels like something we can talk about, and we should talk about,

Heather Vickery 13:11

I really honor that. I really appreciate that. So how did you at the age of what 13 How old were you?

Heather Thorkelson 13:20

14 when I moved to Costa Rica.

Heather Vickery 13:22

How did you at the age of 14? craft a successful life for yourself? And by successful I mean, make sure you were cared for and make sure you did get to school when you were alone? The majority of the time?

Heather Thorkelson 13:35

Yeah, I mean, I will admit, I am from an upper middle class Canadian family. I was put in a private school there because I had to go to school in English. Since I didn't speak Spanish. I was in a private school. So that that was great. I mean, I'm not going to pretend like I'm just this amazing fighter. Like I come from privilege, you know, okay, however honoring that, however, and that's why you know, The intro you mentioned like socio neglects us know, socioeconomic status. And I think that that's a really critical piece people when people think of neglected children, I think they think of children of like, poor people or alcoholics or like have some other like these people that are like, the lower end of society, let's say, and I could not disagree more, you know, there is so much neglect, even at middle class and upper middle class and in the super wealthy, there's so much neglect. And there's emotional neglect, there's physical neglect, there's the varying degrees of it, you know, and I had both those emotional, physical, relational, you know, I was very isolated. And I think that I had been in when we were still in Canada from 10 to 14, that that phase where my mom was already gone, right, my siblings and I were all still under one roof at that point, but we were all sort of in survival mode. We weren't able to be helpful to each other because we were kids, you know, so it started a little bit earlier and then by the time I moved to Costa Rica I was just like, Good grief. Like I, I, I just have to get up every day and make sure that I get things done. Because the other thing is, my dad's attitude was if you keep, quote, unquote, behaving yourself and getting good grades, I'm not gonna mess with you. But if you stop behaving ourselves and your grades slip, you're in deep, you know what, and I had seen him get very abusive with my sibling, I was gonna say, what does that mean? Like, you're not gonna be okay. Are you physically in danger, potentially physically in danger, but also in danger of him, throwing me out with nothing. And at that point, I had been estranged from my mom and all of my aunts and uncles and everyone for four years, and I thought I will have nothing like Where would I go? You know, and because that's what uh, that's what a sociopath makes you believe. You know? Absolutely. And so I was just like, I just gotta, I just gotta kick butt. I got to be amazing. I got to do great in school. I've got to, I mean, I was always quite good in school. So I just had to focus on that. And I have to take care of myself and I have to take care of my sisters. were much more Like, boisterous, let's say, and I was the classic middle kid may lie under the radar, appease appease appease, you know, like, no matter how much I want to take this dinner fork and like stab it into my dad's neck right now, I'm gonna make him feel like the greatest human on the face of the earth because as long as he thinks that I'm the best kid in the world, I can survive this.

Heather Vickery 16:24

what an extraordinary and I use that word in a positive and a negative way to have to behave as a child to learn to behave. Yeah. I suspect though, that that has served you well as up as that is, as a professional adult.

Heather Thorkelson 16:39

Yeah, yeah. It has in so many ways in so many ways, like learning to be able to deal with people like that extremely difficult people, learning how to basically be a chameleon in different scenarios. Knowing that no matter how bad things get, I will still be alive and I will still find food to eat and a place to sleep and all that kind Stuff like I, I've proven that to myself over and over again both under the let's call it rain of my father but then also subsequently later in life when I kind of threw myself into some scenarios that were really terrifying for me just to prove that no matter what happened, I could I could pick myself up and keep going.

Heather Vickery 17:16

So you knew you were putting yourself into dangerous situations?

Heather Thorkelson 17:20

Not so much danger as very foreign and terrifying for me who also was very anxious like I was. I was extremely anxious until about 30 years old.

Heather Vickery 17:31

That's fascinating. So what I'm hearing you say is that you chose bravely but you thought these things are scary, but I'm going to try them anyway.

Heather Thorkelson 17:39

Yeah, yeah. I felt like I had to do it to prove to myself that I could be who I wanted to be. Can you give us an example? Yeah, I so I started University a year younger than everyone else. When I came back to Canada and then I hated it. I went into a really deep depression. I had really bad culture shock when I came back to my own country, I imagine and then and also, I quite frankly had felt like I came back from a warzone. And so everyone seemed very carefree all the other people my age seemed very carefree and like, whatever. And I was like, You don't understand how hard life is. So I was very weird. I was a total weirdo. blacksheep like, I didn't fit in. And so I lasted two years at that university, and then I decided to leave and I thought, okay, I'm, I'm a mess. I'm depressed. I don't have any friends. I don't know how to fit into my own country anymore. I don't even really know who I am. Like, I've been so screwed up by these teenagers. And what's what's happened, that I needed to go and like, I need to test my own limits a little bit and figure out who I am and what I want in this life. And so I moved to Japan when I was 19. With no job, no house lined up, nothing. And I just had, I think about \$3,000 that I'd saved in this really crappy job that I did over the summer. stocking shelves at five o'clock in the morning in a pharmacy, and a backpack and I went to Tokyo and I still remember I have a blog post about this somewhere. I still remember standing on a street corner in Tokyo thinking, I'm going to throw up and then I'm going to lay down on the street and just die. Like what have I done? You know, this introvert in the busiest city. At that point in my life, I was like, this is the most busy hive of a city I can imagine. I understood a little bit of Japanese because I had studied at the University out of curiosity, and I was just like, what am I going to do? Where am I going to live? How am I going to work? And then I just figured it out. You know, like I got geared out, I got over I like every minute of every day that I was there in the first few months. I was spent getting over myself and like being terrified and doing it anyways and that completely changed the game for me.

Heather Vickery 19:52

I love that so much. I mean it's for sure sink or swim. But I think for most people who would knowingly put themselves in that position you're gonna swim. Yeah,

Heather Thorkelson 20:02

yeah, you are. And like, that's a wonderful thing, right? I look, I think deep down, I was like, I'm gonna be fine. But I need to do this anyways, and I need to completely shake up the game, I need to ditch everything else behind because I just didn't even feel like I was living my own life up until that point, you know, I felt like I was playing a game or like doing a song and dance for other people. And so I had to kind of reinvent myself. And part of that was just terrifying the bejesus out of me. And then so that I could come out on the other side, I wanted to be like, cool, I can do this. I can kick ass and take names. I can go out into the world I can learn and be and whatever you know, and yeah, it was quite a transformative time.

Heather Vickery 20:42

I love that. I really do. I think it's so fantastic. And I will say You're right. I love that you brought up earlier that you have an element of privilege. And of course we absolutely agree that neglect does not discriminate against socio economic status, but Your your privilege helped you be able to do that. But goodness, folks, if you're out there, you can create and manifest all kinds of things. I you can look for cheap flights if you want to travel to a remote country and see what the hell happens. Like those are decisions we get to make.

Heather Thorkelson 21:18

Yeah, absolutely.

Heather Vickery 21:20

I love it. I think that is so cool. Heather are you a parent?

Heather Thorkelson 21:24

No, I'm not.

Heather Vickery 21:26

Okay. Do you think that the way you grew up was part of your decision to not be a parent?

Heather Thorkelson 21:33

Well, technically speaking, the jury's still out on Parenthood. I'm gonna I'm at the end of my time when I should be taking it seriously. I'm 41 now so my husband and I are like, Okay, there we have a kid now or we don't have a kid. But I will say that it's, it's definitely I think a kind. It's had a really big impact. And not in that, I don't think that I'd be a good parent or anything like that.

Yeah. I just I've never I've never been around kids very much. And I think they're, they feel very alien to me partially because of the isolation that I had growing up. And so I don't I didn't. For on the one hand, I don't feel that affinity of like, oh, children, babies, you know. And on. On the other hand, I'm like, you know what, I spent so many bloody years of my life with all of the weight of my existence on my shoulders. I don't want to take on the weight of existence of another human right. now.

Heather Vickery 22:26

That's what I was wondering. Yeah, that's the pressure of it, though. You know, I have four kids. I love being a parent. I always knew I wanted to be a parent. But I really don't think everybody's built to be a parent. If fewer people didn't have children that didn't actually want them. We might have a very different society. So I absolutely honor. You know, we all have the right to decide that for ourselves and what's going to work for us I had somebody who worked for me once years ago. Tell me that she did well, that is why we're here isn't it to you know, Continue the species. And I was like, Oh, no.

Yeah, I actually don't think that no.

Heather Thorkelson 23:10

We've got plenty of humans. That's not going to be an issue.

Heather Vickery 23:12

Yeah, I was like, no. So I yeah, they thank you for sharing that. Because I do wonder if those things that are so huge in our lives as we grow up, then continue to alter the choices we make as adults. So, yeah, for sure. Now, how has your lived experience led you to what you do professionally?

Heather Thorkelson 23:41

Well, so I left the corporate world in 2010. And I knew without a shadow of a doubt at that point that I never wanted to work for anyone else again.

Heather Vickery 23:51

I figured that out right out of college.

Heather Thorkelson 23:55

You're very lucky.

I mean, I don't think I am. I can tell you for certain that I never really wanted to work for other people, except that I felt like the financial independence piece for me after breaking free from my dad, when I was 21 was really critical. I needed to be financially independent. I went back to university after I came back from Asia, and I put myself through school and I went into quite a bit of debt because of that, I completely cut my dad off at that point, because he was abusive, and there was no point. And so then I had no money, I had no funds, and I was in touch with my mom, but my mom, my mom, and I have a relationship but she's like, it's a distant relationship. You know, like I have been completely, let's say, financially independent since definitely since 2001. And more or less since I was about 17. So I felt the responsibility of getting myself into a good financial place so that I could be completely independent and debt free, which is why I went and took jobs in my 20s. And then when I was 32, in 2010, that's when I left corporate finally because I was in great Financially, and I was like, that's it. I'm done. I've done exactly what I wanted to. I own a fantastic house, which is a good investment, which I've since sold and bought a new house in Sweden, which is like, amazing. So I'm really happy about that. And, yeah, I knew when I went out on my own, I didn't know what I was going to do. I had no idea how I was literally going to be bringing in the dollars, but I was like, I gotta do something that actually feels motivating for me, when I wake up in the morning, I've got to do something that feels worthwhile, you know? So I started off because I had no clue. I was like, Well, why don't I get certified as a life coach? Because I don't want to be a life coach. But I think that life coaching skills will be good. It's a good skill set to have no matter what you do when you're working with human beings. Right? Yeah. So I started with the life coach, life coach certification, started life coaching just to bring in some money, so it wasn't sitting around on the dole. And then I started realizing that a lot of people from my life coaching certification program were like what on earth? How are you getting so many clients? And then also during that time I moved to Peru from Canada and people were like, how are you finding clients in Peru? Do you coach them in Spanish? And I was like, No, no, no. It's called the internet and Skype. So that turned into helping people develop small businesses online. And then that developed and that developed and I started doing international retreats with, you know, early stage entrepreneurs. And then eventually, by about 2015, I started working with sort of more established entrepreneurs who were looking to uplevel their businesses. And I also opened my own second business, which is a polar expedition company.

Heather Vickery 26:34

That's so cool. It really is really fascinating to me. How do you share with everybody what's the name of your businesses?

Heather Thorkelson 26:45

So my primary business, which is under Heather Nicholson comm is called no plan B, and it's a it's a coaching and consulting company for incurable entrepreneurs like myself, people who can do job they can work for other people, because they're self sufficient and they're motivated and they're detail oriented and blah, blah, blah, blah, blah, but they can handle working in those structures. You know, the nine to five is just not on. And so I mean, even not nine to five, my last corporate job, I worked from home and I worked my own hours, and I freaking hated it because the job was soulless. And I didn't like my coworkers, because I felt that they were not like everyone was just trying to get away with minimum viable work. And that's just not my jam. You know,

right. So incurable entrepreneurs are the people that I work with and that I attract these days. And then my other company, the polar expedition company, has called twin tracks expeditions.

Heather Vickery 27:35

Okay, well, the reason I asked is I knew it was Plan B and I love that and to me, that resonates so much with your childhood and your growing up. Again, your decision, which wasn't really a decision to choose yourself again and again and again and to find a way to survive and thrive and be okay and to push yourself into terrifying areas like moving to Japan, all of that. There's no plan B. Yeah, you there's no way.

Heather Thorkelson 28:03

Yeah. And you just suck it up and make it happen.

Heather Vickery 28:05

Yeah. And I just love that so much. There's no plane small for you. So I think that is really cool. And now I am absolutely curious about polar expeditions.

Heather Thorkelson 28:19

Yeah, I know. It's weird.

Heather Vickery 28:23

I feel really stupid. Like you take people to the polar ice caps and explore is that?

Heather Thorkelson 28:30

Yeah, not quite, but it sounds like that. So. So polar expeditions, the common places that people go are to the Antarctic, of course and to the Arctic. But when you go to the Antarctic as a passenger, like as a traveler, you usually go on an expedition ship scientists go to the polar ice cap. They go deep into Antarctica, where it's like minus 40. But regular people don't go there. Can't you so right. Yeah. So as someone like you, for example, you could book a trip on an expedition ship of 100 or 200 people fly down to the southern tip of South America, sail across the Drake Passage for two days and voila, you're in Antarctica. There's penguins everywhere. There's icebergs everywhere. There's whales. It's totally fantastic. And that is a massive industry and growing. There's about 50,000 people that go there per year right now and it's growing. So we booked people on those trips and also work with my husband who I met in 2013, as a polar expedition leader, I met him on a ship going to Antarctica, okay, and then I was like, why are you trading dollars for hours? This is really stupid career idea. So not stupid but it's very exciting but you you get locked after a while right? What do you do if you're literally your day rate is based on you being on a ship somewhere right then when you're at home, you're not making any money? You have no benefits. You have no safety net. Yeah. So I was like, No, he also has a twin brother. They're Swedes, they're big. They've got red beards, they look straight out of Vikings. And I'm like, you two dudes are a walking brand. We need to have our own company, you know, so In 2015, I said, Let's open up twin tracks expeditions and we start selling this stuff, and then buy it. And then the opposite of that in the Arctic is people go to see polar bears. They go on ships, it's usually to the Norwegian Arctic, which is one of the best places to see polar bears. And we our long term dream was to start hiring our own vessels and running our own trips, because of both of the guys being expedition leaders, me being a certified polar guide as well now, and all of our friends being polar expedition stuff, and that was sort of a thinking we were thinking 2020 2021 but we actually managed to start doing that in 2018. So we are now Yeah, we're now going into our third season, running our own trips only in the Arctic, not Antarctic. But in the Arctic, we run our own trips on small vessels. So 12 passengers, we take people to go see polar bears and walrus and all kinds of cool stuff.

Heather Vickery 30:49

I want to go. It's amazing. I mean, I hate I hate the cold. I can't tell you how much I hate the cold. So the fact that I was sitting here saying, I gotta do that I gotta do it. I'm gonna put it on my vision board

Heather Thorkelson 31:04

I have Heather, let me tell you, I hate the cold more than most people. I moved to Peru from Canada because I was like, That's it, I'm done with winter, I'm going to a moderate climate, I'm never going back. And then I ended up meeting this guy. And the next thing you know, I'm working on the ship so that I can be with him. I'm like taking a break from my business company, you know, my business consulting and like going away for two months at a time to be with him on ships and driving zodiacs and stuff. I bloody hate the cold and I have really bad circulation and my fingers and toes. I'm always freezing. And now I have a polar expedition company and I gotta tell ya, it took me 35 years to learn it but it's all about how you dress. I love life. Well that's that's true.

Heather Vickery 31:42

What I love about you is like, okay, you seem like you just have no fucks to give quite frankly, excuse my language like you're like I will do all the things that make me excited.

Heather Thorkelson 32:10

Yeah, I think that's a pretty accurate representation of me. Just all need more of that in our lives, do more of the things that make you excited. Trust yourself enough. And just say yes to the stuff that you think is exciting. And who cares what everyone else thinks.

Heather Vickery 32:16

Oh, I love that. So how as you've been doing I mean, when I think about your childhood, there could be a million answers for this. But as you've grown from that, what's been the most because it sounds like everything's kind of been easy, which I know it wasn't when you were growing up, but since then, so what's been the most difficult thing? And I know that it probably hasn't all been easy, but to hear you talk about it. Yeah, hearing.

Heather Thorkelson 32:40

It's, it's it sounds Yeah, you're right. It sounds easy. It's so not easy, Heather. I can't even tell you like none of it's easy. It's all really tough.

Heather Vickery 32:48

People need to hear that right. It's not easy doing the things that make you excited are worth it, but they're not easy?

Heather Thorkelson 32:53

No, it's not easy at all. But your tolerance level for things like uncertainty and risk really, really change. The more you take risks and the more uncertainty you live with, and so, you know, it's never easy. It's never easy. The most difficult thing for me, actually right up until about the time that I met my husband. The most difficult thing was truly the aloneness of my own journey in the world. I had nobody I had nobody to fall back on. I had no safety net, I had no home to go home to if I was tired or broke or having a mental breakdown. I had nothing I didn't even have. Like I moved around so much over my life. I live in Sweden. Now I'm from Canada. This is my seventh country outside of Canada. And I had no single person who has even come to visit me in the

different places where I've lived around the world. So I have nobody who shares my story. You know, I have my younger sister who I am not who I don't really have much communication with.

I have my older sister who I've always been in some degree of communication with, but she's never been to Most of the places that I've lived outside of Canada so nobody knows my friends in those different places, nobody knows the journeys that I've been on. Nobody knows the struggles that I've been through with entrepreneurship. It's only been me and when you don't have anyone to talk to who shares that story who carries your story with you and, and or it can help be a soft place to land. It's, it's crushing. And it wasn't until I had my until I met my husband, where he literally said to me, like I am your soft place to land I'm your family now. And I was like chills. I love that. Oh, he can make me cry so easily because it's true like I he is he and his family actually who are very close and really wonderful have just been an absolute blessing for me. It's allowed me to rest for the first time in my life.

Heather Vickery 34:49

Wow. That's incredible.

Heather Thorkelson 34:52

Yeah.

Heather Vickery 34:53

So I my next question, and you may have just answered it is what's been the greatest surprise The most wonderful pleasant surprise

Heather Thorkelson 35:04

Ah, what's been the most wonderful pleasant surprise? I think that that idea that if you have a dream and you put your mind to it, you can make it happen. That's been a surprise because it's turning out to be true again and again and again. You know, I think the only thing that really limits me and again I'm coming from a place of privilege I'm a white lady I'm able bodied you know, I live in a country where we have socialized everything and like even University is free. But still, I realize now that you know the most of the limitations in my life are just in me, in myself between my own two ears and in how big I choose to dream. So, you know, comfort is a very sexy thing. You want to stay comfortable all the time, right and right now I'm a little bit craving comfort. But not too comfortable, but I'm craving just like not taking too much risk because the last few years have been mega risk taking with smaller company. But you know, I know myself within the next 18 months I'm gonna be ready to start going really big again. And you know Yeah, it'll be interesting to see what happens. I love it.

Heather Vickery

Does this feel brave to you? Does your life feel brave to you?

Heather Thorkelson

It does and only because I don't really know that many people that live a life like mine.

Heather Vickery 36:30

I don't know anyone. I've interviewed people who take their business on the road and travel the world. So that part is there, but all of the elements that you're doing with the background that you have, I think it's pretty damn brave.

Heather Thorkelson 36:43

Thank you very much.

Heather Vickery 36:45

But I think it's all brave. I really do. I mean, that's the mission of the show is there are 1000 ways to embrace bravery every single day and my favorite little nugget from this entire conversation is the idea that you can do the things Make you excited you can do them. And that is incredibly brave for most people.

Heather Thorkelson 37:06

Yeah, absolutely. And I don't want to discount the small acts of bravery that people experience every single day. And like, I'm not kidding when I say that I'm an introvert. I'm very, very socially capable. If you see me at a conference, I'll be chatting everyone's ear off. But most of the time I like to be alone. I live in the middle of nowhere in Sweden, like in a tiny little country village. And I love it. And if I don't see anyone for days, I'm super happy.

Heather Vickery 37:31

Also you were used to it. Yeah, you always lived your life.

Heather Thorkelson 37:34

Yeah, exactly. Like I've been so isolated, that it almost became the norm, you know, for me to go to the post office and speak to someone in Swedish about picking up a postal package. That takes a lot of guts for me. So like, it's a weird thing, right. And I think people listen, especially people who are more introverted or who are more, you know, just maybe socially anxious and stuff like that. We'll understand exactly that. Like you can go out there and have like, run a polar Expo. company and like to write books and like, I speak at conferences sometimes, you know, do all these things. But at the end of the day, I'm kind of like crapping my pants a little bit when I'm going down to the post office to talk to the lady in Swedish. You know, like, God, to me requires a lot of bravery.

Heather Vickery 38:14

You know, thank you for sharing that. I mean, it's so fabulous for everybody who's listening like you can be a powerhouse, a badass that does incredible things. And then the most seemingly basic nuanced thing can be terrifying for you and that's okay.

Heather Thorkelson 38:30

Yeah, it's total. It's not only is it okay, it's normal. Yeah, it's normal. We are weird. People are funny creatures and like, whatever it is that you're dealing with. It's fine. And you know what, give yourself some credit. Like, that's brave. If you do one small act of bravery every day. You're a brave person. Yeah. Oh my gosh, I love it. This has been such a fun conversation. You mentioned writing a book and you have a new book out. Is that right? Yes. It's called no plan B. And it is specifically for as I mentioned earlier, incurable entrepreneurs. It's not a how to build a business book. It is how to become the entrepreneur you need to be to make the change that you want in the world.

Heather Vickery 39:06

That's awesome. I cannot wait to get my own copy of it. What I'd like to quickly ask you is what's your writing style? How did you get this book written?

Heather Thorkelson 39:15

Oh, well, I wrote a first draft just with an accountability partner, which was really tough. I committed to 500 words a day. And it took me four months. And then I hired a developmental editor who basically took my original draft, transmogrified it into like, you know, chapters. She's like, here's how you need to structure all this content so that it makes sense. And we're gonna rewrite it and we rewrote it over another. Just under six months. It took me to write the second and final draft.

Heather Vickery 39:43

Yeah, that's awesome. I love that you shared that. First of all, your writing habit is by committing to 500 words a day, which is pretty manageable, but still to do anything every day until you're done is a huge commitment. And those developmental editors are genius, they're life changing the best because we need somebody outside. I can't tell you how many times I send things out with typos. I feel like an idiot. But I know what it's supposed to say. I don't notice the mistake or it makes sense to me. So you need somebody on the outside to, to refocus that for you

Heather Thorkelson 40:16

totally. And everyone who I know so many people were like, oh, I've been writing a book for about four years. And I'm like, yeah, it's not gonna get written because you're doing it in a vacuum. We all need people, you know, people who are writing like a book a year, like all these entrepreneurs who are just killing it out there. They either have ghost writers or they have editors that are actually holding them to timelines. Oh, yeah. Nobody does it alone.

Heather Vickery 40:34

Yeah, this year alone here in 2020. I have in the makings, two ebooks, a full length book, and then a collaborative book, and there's no way of doing it on my own. People are like, You're crazy. And I'm like, I don't know there's a system in place. So yeah. I don't want to perpetuate a myth that everybody does things alone. Nobody does anything successfully, completely alone, in my opinion.

Heather Thorkelson 40:56

Yep. I agree.

Heather Vickery 40:57

So you, you've got this book. out which is so exciting you started you know this new business you got the ship which I think is incredible. We're going to link to all of that in the show notes. You find out that you survived this neglectful somewhat abusive childhood. So many things to celebrate. How do you like to celebrate?

Heather Thorkelson 41:20

I like to go out into the woods. I really like to be out in the woods in nature. In Sweden, we have a season that's all like foraging. So from about July to November, you can get tons of wild blueberries lingonberries and different kinds of mushrooms in the forest.

Heather Vickery 41:33

Now I need to go to Sweden.

Heather Thorkelson 41:34

Really you do. Like if you like being outdoors this places like the forests here have forest floors that are covered in all this like soft moss and you walk into it and you think oh my god, I'm in a fairytale like is this where the Vikings came from what is going on here? And it's magic. And so I like whenever I really accomplish

something big or I just whatever. What I like to do is really just get away from my to do list. I want to get out of the house. When Go to the forest, breathe the air, find some chanterelles, and be happy. I love it out there.

Heather Vickery 42:05

I love it. That's a beautiful form of celebration and you painted such a gorgeous picture of that. Thank you for sharing it. And then my last question for you, Heather, which I just adore you. I want to be friends. Can we be real life friends?

Heather Thorkelson 42:17

Absolutely. Okay. Sure.

Heather Vickery 42:20

Great. Excellent. So I hate to even in the conversation now. I feel like I have to travel the world just to go hang out with you in person, but I am completely invited myself into everybody. So Heather, I hope that was okay.

Heather Thorkelson 42:30

It's all good.

Heather Vickery 42:32

What is your favorite charitable organization to support?

Heather Thorkelson 42:36

I like to support Kiva. I've been supporting Kiva since probably 2005 right around the time that they started to grow. And the reason why I like to support Kiva is because it's empowering individual people with micro loans. I think that's, you know, for people who don't have any kind of generational wealth at all available to them, like self included, I'd love a micro loan, you know, and so I think I come from privilege i can i can help if I can help some, like a single mother or somewhere in a developing country get her business up and running, then that is money well spent.

Heather Vickery 43:09

Yeah, absolutely. I love that. Thank you for sharing. They'll be our charity of the week, folks. Go see what you could do to support them for very little money or time or just, you know, telling other people about the organization, you can make a huge, huge impact. Heather, will you share your three words with us one last time?

Heather Thorkelson 43:26

Yes, they are resilience, self belief and tenacity. Those are

Heather Vickery 43:30

excellent, powerful words, and I can see them in you. It's a beautiful picture. I want to thank you so much for taking the time to be here across oceans to be in this conversation with me and it was just really fantastic.

Heather Thorkelson 43:45

Thank you so much, Heather. I've really enjoyed speaking with you.

Heather Vickery 43:48

listeners. You know, resilience isn't something you're just born with. Heather just showed us that while there may be a case for some people, that they just automatically know how to be resilient. It's also a learnable skill. You're not stuck. Your past doesn't define you, your weaknesses and your failures do not define you. You have everything you need to change your situation. You have everything you need to do the things that make you excited if that's what you desire. I hope you love the brave files as much as we love producing it. And if you do, I asked you to please go and check out our Patreon page, find a level of support that works for you and become part of our extraordinary brave movement. You can find us@patreon.com slash brave files. And I want to know what you think of this show. How are you resilient? I really want to know based on this week's conversation, what thing gets you excited that you're now going to try give us a call at 312-646-0205 and share all the goodies with us. Thank you for being here. This is Heather Vickery reminding you today and always to go out and Choose bravely.

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