

**Candice Schutter:** *Thought-terminating cliches reflect a characteristic feature of ideological totalitarianism. The subordination of human experience to the claims of doctrine. This primacy of doctrine over person is evident in the continual shift between experience itself and the highly abstract interpretation of such experience. It has much to do with the particular aura of half-reality, which a totalist environment seems, at least to the outsider, to possess. The inspiriting force of such myths cannot be denied, nor can one ignore their capacity for mischief. For when the myth becomes fused with the totalist sacred science, the resulting "logic" can be so compelling and coercive that it simply replaces the realities of individual experience.*

Robert Jay Lifton. From his book, *Thought Reform and the Psychology of Totalism*.

May he rest in peace.

## Teaser

**T Brown:** And this is something I see echoed in every cult story is that the kids are not protected. Because the parents are dissociated. And we are *occupied* by the guru. I'm using that phrase with all of its meanings, the word occupation. I'm obsessively occupied with the guru. And that means that I put my child at risk for his approval.

And it was part of our group ethic to avoid vaccinations. I thought that we were special. I thought that we were carrying a responsibility for the world.

So to me it's the most glaring example of extremism.

## Intro Clip

**Candice Schutter:** Welcome back to The Deeper Pulse.

I wasn't planning to release another episode here on the main feed until later this fall when I'm going to be deconstructing leadership with a whole new lineup of guests.

But a few weeks ago I sat down with a new friend via Zoom, and he and I just sort of hit it off, and in fact had so much to talk about that I decided to invite him to come back here to share on the podcast.

You've heard me go on and on about the dangers of spiritual echo chambers and how they feed into things like gender essentialism and anti-establishment extremism, but there's nothing more powerful than stories that illustrate these dynamics.

T has been like me for the past few years using his curiosity and creativity to carve a path back to himself. And often when we talk about cult dynamics, we spend most of our time rehashing how we got involved, what it was like while in, and how the hell we got out, which all of that is time well spent to be sure. But something that doesn't get emphasized enough is that exiting a high-demand group is only the first step of a much, much longer journey. And

today, T and I focus our attention on the aftermath and the hard insights that sometimes take years to find us.

Because there's so much here, I've divided our conversation into three chapters. In the first part, T shares how he's found cult recovery at the intersection of art and academia. And he walks us through a powerful performance art piece that he's developed and will be performing at the Melbourne Fringe Festival later this month.

In chapter two, T describes the headspace that he was in while raising his daughter in the cult, and in doing so, provides us with helpful awareness around what works and what doesn't when we're attempting to talk with someone who is all-in on an ideology.

Then in the final third of the episode, T shares how, even though he first joined his group as an out gay man, he nevertheless chose to marry a woman while on the inside. And he tells us what it took for him to come out for a second time and reclaim his right to trust his body and his desires all over again.

Today's episode speaks for itself. So we're gonna jump right in. Here's my conversation with T Brown.

### Interview Begins

Well, hello, T. Thank you so much for agreeing to be on The Deeper Pulse. I'm so excited to sit down and talk to you again.

**T Brown:** Thank you so much. It's a pleasure to speak with you again. And yes, this will be fun I think.

**Candice Schutter:** I think it will, our first conversation, I felt like we could have just kept going and going and going. And given our rapport and how kind of quickly we fell into it, we realized there was a lot of different places that we could go. And so, we just decided to just trust our instincts and we have a few ideas. But we're just gonna speak heart to heart and trust that there'll be something in there for all of you out there.

So thanks for tuning in to listen with us today.

And T, would you like to just introduce yourself to The Deeper Pulse?

**T Brown:** Sure. Yeah, um. It's funny, the first thing in my mind. I saw one of your posts that you were teaching at Yavapai College, and I just wanna say that I lived in Prescott for two years or

so, and the thing I remember about Yavapai College in Prescott was that I saw Emmylou Harris there.

**Candice Schutter:** Funny.

**T Brown:** And I drove through Cottonwood a lot. Because I would. I mean, I'm, I'm Midwestern. So living in Arizona was an incredible experience of like, every weekend I could get in my car and drive somewhere completely different and see amazing beautiful things. And in the Midwest, you can't really do that in the same way.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** You know.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** It's a very different world physically, which affected how I felt out there. But anyway, that's not who I am now. That was a long time ago, and that was more than 30 years ago.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Now I am sitting here in Illinois in my house. And the reason I'm here on this podcast talking with you is that I was for 23 years part of a Sufi group. And it's based here. And it's a very long story, which I'm writing and thinking about a lot. And in that group I took a vow of obedience to a Sheikh, who's a North American guy from Peoria. And when COVID came and lockdown came is when I was able to make a separation and realize that I had been in an abusive environment.

And so the last five and a half years I've been recovering my senses, my sense of self, my body. And I've done a lot of studying and writing and expressing and creative work. And I'm now writing a dissertation about my experience. And I, I'm writing it from a performance studies perspective, which is, we call it autoethnographic. So I sort of situate myself in the performance of this whole thing, which lets me get a little bit more into the details of the way things felt, the way things smelled, the way the guru looked, the things he did, and the way that we responded to it. And the, the way that these, I would say performative aspects of it are echoed throughout abusive environments that I see notated in people's work and performances and documentaries. And I'm like, this is the same, this is the same, this is the same. This is the same.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** So where, where during that whole thing, I felt I was on a special path of, you know, unique importance. In fact, I was part of something that is recreated a zillion different ways, abusively to serve the leader.

And, um, this is really why we found each other, was you know, deconstructing whatever, expressing ourselves, finding a way to, you know, reclaim the things we lost in that experience.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Well said. And it is, it is quite a story.

And I just wanna say to everyone listening out there that I'm gonna be linking to your YouTube channel so people could explore a little bit more.

And you and I do have another thing in common in that even though our separation from groups, my experience was more of a larger culture rather than just in one group. It was a myriad of groups. There was a lot of, of time between when I started my recovery and when I left.

But we both did a lot of recovery out loud in front of people. And you've done a lot of that on your YouTube channel. I was directed to your work by some other people in the cult recovery community. It was very thought provoking.

The thing I feel really drawn to you, we seem to both have this depth of feeling, but also this insatiable desire to sort of intellectually understand what happened. Right?

I mean, tell us about your dissertation and what that process is like for you. You're also creative and an artist expressing in that vein as well. There's a lot there. But there's something about, you described the embodiment, like doing the performance and actually getting into the sensations of the experience in order to convey it. But also you're looking at it through an intellectual lens.

Can you talk about what those do for you and why they're both important?

**T Brown:** Well, gosh, there's. First I should say that I didn't even know two miles from me where I live at at Southern Illinois University is this performance studies department that has international kind of acclaim. I didn't know it existed. I didn't know what it was. So.

Okay. When I joined the group, when I met the Sufis in 1997, I was in a PhD program in counseling psychology Indiana University. That was my dad's old department.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm. Right, 'cause you grew up in an academic family.

**T Brown:** My father's a professor. My mother's sort of second wave feminist.

Funny things, like I remember as a teenager, I drove her car and it had a bumper sticker on the back that said, I'm pro-choice and I vote. It was, you know, the early eighties. I didn't even know what that meant.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**T Brown:** But it was my mother's bumper sticker. So, yeah, this was. And we were not religious, right?

So anyway, I was in that PhD program. After about a year of knowing the Sufis, I asked the guru's permission because that's what you did, if I could quit and I did. So when I came out of the group, one of the things I wanted to do was finish that PhD in some way.

Now I do want to say that this is not for everyone, and I was not in great shape at all. Plus it was COVID. So coming out of this experience is, as I think most of your listeners will know, so chaotic and difficult.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** And, um, it's coming out of that bubble of like, wow, all these things I thought were real, were not real.

And then I discovered that he was abusive in ways that I didn't know. And that came from my being a loud mouth on YouTube. So my visibility on YouTube brought other survivors back, and I heard their stories and that's when I learned this was prototypically abusive, archetypally abusive guy.

So I had a new partner. Another thing I can talk about, where I was married to a woman in the group. I was before, in the sense that I was out as a gay person in the group. I married a woman. Coming out of the group. We divorced. I came out of the closet again.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**T Brown:** And had a new partner. My new partner is retired from the theater department here. And, um, I started talking to him. I, I entered school to be a counselor. And at some point I was like, I don't know if I want this. I was talking to him and I said, I wanna perform, I wanna do these things.

And he goes, it sounds like you're describing performance studies.

And I said, well, what is that?

And he said, well, my friend is the former chair of the department.

So I'm like, cool.

So, uh, this man comes over, sits in the backyard with me in November, 'cause we're social distancing, tells me about performance studies, and I changed. All that to say, we were online at that time, but I found over the next few years a group of academics who were most compassionate, flexible, humane. So I was allowed to take this sort of, I would say, academic journey, which includes a lot of artistic expression and a lot of being able to explore my experience performatively, intellectually. And I just did all these different kinds of things. And then I got to perform on our little theater stage. And I could propose a show.

And this is where I learned a lot about trauma and artistic expression. So I went to propose a show for the theater. And I had only been out a year when I wrote this proposal. I'm gonna do the show about the cult. And I down to write it and it felt like, the metaphor was sort of like I was proposing to climb a mountain and I was still kind of in the foothills, lost in the woods.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** Like I couldn't even see the mountain.

And I'm like, supposed to write about the mountain. And I was like, I can't do this.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** It's just too huge. Like, I can't see, it's like, I don't know, like seeing a city from an airplane like that I'd never been to before. Kind of, these are metaphors of sort of like, I can't decide what to put on a stage for an hour.

So interestingly, what I ended up doing for that show was writing about my adolescence,

**Candice Schutter:** which

**T Brown:** was traumatic, but easy to write about 'cause.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, I know the feeling.

**T Brown:** Yeah. You know, it was like. That show is actually on YouTube, but it was a lot of music. It was, like, Freddie Mercury makes an appearance,

**Candice Schutter:** Nice.

**T Brown:** Morrissey makes an appearance.

These people who were really influential to me and just sort of navigating being a gay kid in like 1984 and how that felt. And, um, so nothing about the cult.

Meanwhile I'm making all these videos on YouTube, so I'm creating content that's having an effect in ways that I didn't even know at the time. But, so I'm, I'm telling stories. And I'm getting it out there. And I'm doing that in school and on my own, different aesthetics, right?

So I sit down to write this master's thesis and it's, it ends up being about my creativity was impacted by being in a cult. That's not the exact, forget the title, but. And I wrote about how I was a songwriter and how I had to learn in the cult to always please the master.

And that was, you know, that wasn't just in the air, it was explicit. Like that was our spiritual obligation. I took a vow to obey him and I, what I had to do to navigate his really abusive personality was to learn to write songs for him. 'Cause he was, we had a band, I was the drummer. He was the guitarist.

So what I traced in this project was kind of the way that my songwriting evolved to meet his needs. That was the first thing. But also how my creative offerings in that environment were solely for him. In other words, he could do whatever he wanted to them without any kind of, he certainly didn't need permission from me. Because my perspective and our perspective was that any way that he would change it would just make it more godly. You know, because he was divinely inspired and had divine permission. And I was nothing and so whatever creative offering I made to him was his. And for me to display any kind of problem with that was to go against the faith, the obedience, the permission that I gave him to be in charge of my spiritual path.

So, all that to say, by the time I'm sitting to write a dissertation, which is, you know, three years after that. I had 750, I don't know, maybe 700 pages of text. And it was everything that I had said out loud or written since March of 2020. And some documents from the time in the cult.

I do want to quickly say that I use the word cult intentionally, and I've written a lot about and thought a lot about that. So I, I use it because I believe it fits the definitions that I've studied. And also it's empowering to me. I like giving them that label. It helps me with my sense of agency.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm. That's fair.

**T Brown:** Anyway. So now, now that I'm writing the dissertation, it's sort of flowing out of me. I'm about to finish it. A lot of the writing is done. The bones are there already. And yeah, it's hard, but it's not as hard as it was two years ago. It's not as hard as it was a year ago.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And, uh, and I think what I have here is a pretty rich, pretty detailed document of, of the things I felt inside that prison.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**T Brown:** That was a long answer to your question. I hope that was helpful.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Yeah, it is. It gives context. And I think that's the thing that gets lost in a lot of the storytelling. Why I love long form conversations is, especially in the mainstream storytelling of people who've been involved in cults or high demand groups, is there's often a skipping over of how things progress and sort of the frog in water situation before things get a little hairy. That's often glossed over.

And then the sort of exodus is sensationalized just as much as the involvement in it. And then the story just sort of cuts off. And everyone lived happily ever after. It's like the person got out of the cult and now they're free. And it's like, that's not how it really works.

**T Brown:** No, correct.

**Candice Schutter:** That's not how it ever works when it's genuinely a cult dynamic. It's a many years process. And that liberation, it happens in stages. It happens in community. It happens in isolation. And so you kind of walking through that.

And so I personally really appreciate you sharing that. And I think for anyone out there who maybe hasn't been through that process, or is in that process, just to say it takes time. And what we end up doing with it is so unique to our interests and abilities. And so I would love for you to just share a little bit about the performance that you're taking to.

**T Brown:** Melbourne. Melbourne Fringe. Yeah. Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. In, in Australia. So you're gonna be going in just a few weeks, so tell us about that.

**T Brown:** Okay. Well again, this is, this is funny. So, gosh, I guess it was two years ago I went to propose this show. No, it was two years ago in the spring. Okay. So a year and a half ago. Sorry.

**Candice Schutter:** That's okay.

**T Brown:** Um, I just wanna take a moment to say like, not that we're all these sensitive souls. But I still have so many experiences where I just have a social interaction and then cringe for three weeks afterwards.

Like, like I'm, I'm just, I'm, I just wanna acknowledge that I'm one of these people who just like operates in the world with this sense of like, I don't know if it's trauma. I don't like. What's, what's great about the, the ethos that we're in right now is I'm learning so much about sort of neurodivergent A DHD, autism in these ways that I kind of look back and I go like, oh, there was something going on with me that there was no language for.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**T Brown:** Some of it may have been a trauma abuse. But others, I just came out that way of being like awkward and attentive and observant and

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** I, just was like, like as a little kid.



**Candice Schutter:** Absolutely.

**T Brown:** So here I am again.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, I love it. I love it. You just, you just do you.

**T Brown:** Yeah. And I guess, I guess now at 57, I'm sort of learning to just be like it.

**Candice Schutter:** It's a process. Yeah. It's so much easier said than done too. And the, and the looking back and like dissecting our former behavior. I mean, I think, I think that it, it can be both. Like, it can be like a temperamental, like our wiring.

But also, I mean, I definitely feel like that's something that I've had to really unravel coming out of high demand environments. Because it was such a specific expectation around how I was meant to behave and express myself.

And it was like I already had hypervigilance 'cause of my childhood, and that's a whole other conversation, like, is that part of why I was drawn to it? Blah, blah, blah. But it was like this other layer of hypervigilance.

And coming out of it, it's like, oh, can I just be messy? Can I be awkward? Can I change the subject? Can I meander? Can I do all the things that I, you know, was like policing myself around for so many years? Can I just let it rip? And

**T Brown:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, it's ease, it's easy to say, yeah, sure you can, you have permission, right?

**T Brown:** Well, whatever.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, yeah.

**T Brown:** Okay so, this leads great into this proposal.

So I sit down again to write this show. And I'm gonna write a show called Quit Your Cults. And I sit down to write this thing and I'm like, I don't want to just tell the story on a stage. I wanted to get my songwriting back. So I wanted to write three and a half minute songs, but I couldn't. So then, and I knew that this wasn't feeling right.

And so I ended up writing a show with no words. I created a 60 minute show and each minute was a year my life.

And, and what I did first was I sat down and made an audio video. I basically made a film. And every minute is a year. So I would go back to like that thing that happened when I was

seven and I would put it conceptually into video and audio and I made music. And all of this is on YouTube, the whole thing, the whole 60 minute thing.

And so I built this thing. And then, I knew what I wanted to do with the cult years. So in this show, minute 29 is when I meet the cult. And on the stage, I have these little, uh, colored papers crumpled up kind of all over the stage, which to, it sort of symbolized me in my twenties, sort of not being able to hold together. So I had these little papers. At the beginning they were in a circle, like, so when I'm little, they're in a circle. Trauma happens. I end up picking them all up and holding them. So all the little beautiful, colorful pieces of myself. And um, then in my twenties, I spill them everywhere, right? Because I couldn't hold it together in my twenties, which was why I was in Prescott, Arizona.

**Candice Schutter:** Sounds about right.

**T Brown:** To get out of New York City, 'cause shit spilled everywhere.

So minute 29, this giant light comes on. And so over the next, I don't know, 3, 4, 5 minutes of time I sort of become centered on this light. And then, what I do is I sweep all of the color off of the stage. Like I take all these little papers and I go... and I clear out this sort of, and I build this structure. And I sit there. And then what happens over the next 15, 20 minutes is this rhythmic music starts to happen that I built. And it's based on, uh, in Sufi. People in Sedona for, oh, forgive me for doing this. Let me just say like, people in the,

**Candice Schutter:** You can say whatever you want about Sedona. You will not hurt my feelings.

**T Brown:** Let me just say that the white people, new age, spirituality world, people have heard of Sufis and zikrs. Okay.

A zikr is this thing that we did as a practice, and it's a rhythmic chanting, right? So I recreate this rhythm in the show without the words, 'cause I don't wanna offend anybody. And then I start to do this movement. I repeat this movement way too long and it gets really hard and arduous. And like I, the audience's response is sort of like. A lot of people say to me like, God, it went on so long.

And then they realized in the middle of it, oh, that's the point.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** The point is that I'm trapped in this thing and I'm trying to make it work. And I,

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** I try harder and I try harder, and I try harder and I try harder. And then suddenly in year 52, the music just stopped.

So what you described earlier was really, I think important. It wasn't like, oh, the cult's over. It

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** It was like

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** several minutes of complete, complete, like.

And then I have these shadows of me still doing the movements on the projector. So there's like, the echo of the movement that won't stop.

**Candice Schutter:** It's still in your consciousness. It's still operating you behind the scenes. Absolutely. Yeah.

**T Brown:** It's in your body. It's in your brain.

**Candice Schutter:** Absolutely.

**T Brown:** That like, the mantras, the ways that I learned to think are just.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** They are hardwire after that long.

So, I mean, what I love about the end of the show that we developed is that, it's mostly me taking a breath and sort of sitting still. And then the, the house lights gradually come up. And I don't mind spoiling it because I don't really believe, I don't want it to be mysterious. I want this to be transparent. Like, I'm not interested in being that performance artist who's like, oh, you didn't get it. You know, like. Sorry, go read a book.

Or like, I just like, I'm just like, I'm telling this story. In fact

**Candice Schutter:** I love it.

**T Brown:** I introduce it before the show just to be like, hey, I'm gonna do this thing. This is what it is. You know, I want it to be accessible.

So at the end, the house lights gradually come up. And one of the things that developed in rehearsal, which was really moving, was me starting to pick up the papers again. So I take this little colored paper and I put it into my empty bowl. Like this is mine.

This is me.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

And I get to have it back.

Yes. Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** And uh, and then in the performance of it, people got up and helped me do it just spontaneously, right?

**Candice Schutter:** Oh, I love that.

**T Brown:** And then the lights are on. So there's not like a fourth wall thing. Like, I don't disappear. I wanted it to be like, here we are together. And the people gathered in that audience, you know, most of them I knew 'cause it was here. Like I'm still in the same little town as the cult, right.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**T Brown:** And, uh, but I got to just be with people like, like here we are.

So anyway, all that to say, I'm doing this show seven nights in a row at the freaking Melbourne Fringe Festival because they thought it was cool.

**Candice Schutter:** It is.

**T Brown:** I have never done something like this. Like I've never had the opportunity to like kind of go somewhere. And I'm working with all the accessibility people there, because the whole point of this is that I want people to feel like they can engage with it. The whole point of this is that people can get up and leave if they need to. They can move around, they can engage with it in ways that they want.

And there's resources available to them. I'm connecting with some support groups over there for people living religious abuse.

**Candice Schutter:** It sounds really visceral. What I love about it is, particularly, you're describing those years when you're in it and it's just repetitive and people are like, why is it still going on? Oh wait, that's, it's still going on for like, you're putting people in the sensation of it without words.

What I think so brilliant about it is that the thing that gets in the way the most, I think with my recovery, and people are gonna find this incredibly ironic and some of them are gonna laugh out loud because I have hundreds of hours of content, is the words.

Like, the words sort of get in the way. In some ways they're liberating, but they're also, they get in the way. 'Cause they keep putting boxes around things that can't be, language is its own little prison in a way. 'Cause it's like you can't, as soon as you call it this thing, then it sort of implies this binary, well then it's not that. And it's like, no, actually it's both.

There's a reason why I called the podcast The Deeper Pulse because that nuance is, is what I wanna keep returning to. And the thing about something that's embodied, like the most nuanced thing is to experience something as a sensation and not be able to have words for it. That's like the heart of nuance. And so for you to deliver the experience of what this is like to people on a visceral level that isn't like. And this is what love bombing is. And this is what, like all the things that we do that we need to do, I'm, I'm mocking it. But like I'm mocking it even as I do it because it serves a purpose and then it has limitations, is what I'm saying.

And so, you're opening a new doorway. It's not surprising to me that they said, yes, please come do this. Because this is a new approach to an age old problem that keeps reasserting itself. And, um, I'm just thrilled for you. Congrats on the opportunity. Yeah, it's very exciting.

So I'm gonna shift gears because I'm curious. You said that you kind of got involved in some conspiracy theories. Can you share a little bit about that with us?

**T Brown:** Okay. The best example, and this is actually in the dissertation. I'm writing about parenting. 'Cause I had a kid in the group. And it's one of the hardest things to write about.

She's an adult now. She's 23.

**Candice Schutter:** You had her just a few years into being in the group. So she grew up mostly in.

**T Brown:** She grew up a hundred percent, in the, in the, in the cult.

**Candice Schutter:** Okay.

**T Brown:** And she's out now.

**Candice Schutter:** Her story to tell, we'll, we'll leave it at that. I just, yeah.

**T Brown:** Yeah. Let me just, 'cause it's her story to tell. Let me just tell that writing about relationship to her and to the other children. And this is something I see echoed in every cult story, is that the kids are not protected. And I have a lot of different examples of that. Because the parents are dissociated. And we are obsessed and consumed in the word that I use in my dissertation, we are *occupied* by the guru.

**Candice Schutter:** Yes, well said.

**T Brown:** I'm using that phrase with its sort of political, all of its meanings, the word occupation. And the reason I'm using that in the dissertation is because I feel like some of the metaphors and descriptions of sort of being brainwashed tend to be focused on sort of the characteristics of the person rather than the relationship.

So I'm obsessively occupied as much as I can physically make myself and my brain do it with the guru. Right? And that means that I put my child at risk for his approval.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And that creates extremism. So to me it's the most glaring example of extremism. In my experience, I will do at some point anything that I'm told.

All that to say, we did not vaccinate her. And it was part of our group ethic to avoid vaccinations. So when you say conspiratorial thinking. I mean, in general I can just say that I thought that we were special. I thought that we were carrying a responsibility for the world. And both of those things fundamentally fuck up your relationship with people. You know.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** I think, deeply. So like, I thought I had an answer for all people at all times and all things. Right. While at the same time denying that I felt that way because, I mean, it's weird. Okay. So.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** So the, the anti-vax thing. A few years before I got out, I became the manager of our bakery because every cult has a fucking bakery.

Right? Um.

So there's so many, there's so many kind of sad, funny stories about that. About how like, by this time I'm 50 and I'm like, the guru raises my pay to \$14 an hour, and I go to him crying with gratitude, stuff like that. You know.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** Of course in the meantime, I'm volunteering 40 hours a week.

**Candice Schutter:** Of course you are.

**T Brown:** Beyond my, you know. So I'm, I'm really making like \$3 an hour.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** But, oh my God, thank you for giving me this \$14 an hour.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** Okay. So anyway, I finally have some agency. And what I did is I got onto social media for the first time ever.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm. Were you not supposed to be on it or was it not really?

**T Brown:** It was just discouraged. Kind of like, why. It's like with voting. It was sort of like, well, why would you vote? Like we're here doing this thing. And you weren't forbidden. It just was like, I mean, really? You know.

**Candice Schutter:** Uhhuh, right.

**T Brown:** So this is what happened is I found, suddenly I'm on Facebook and I'm making, I'm making goofy videos of myself parroting pop songs with baked goods as a reference, like I'm doing funny things.

And so I, so I'm on Facebook and I'm kind of like finding people. And I found all these people from my past. Finding whole world of alums from my little liberal arts college that I went to called Grinnell. Like thousands of people in this alumni network and I started posting my videos there. And I found people that I used to know, and a lot of these people were smarty pants people. Like they're scientists and they're doctors and they're, you know, not all of them, but a lot of them are really smart people who aren't anti-vaxxers. Right.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** So, and, and I remember being on these pages. And, and, and I was still sort of socially liberal. I was kinda like, yeah. Even though I "wasn't gay anymore," I still saw myself as a social liberal except when issues of vaccinations would come up.

So that's when the lefties would fill their posts with vitriol against anti-vaxxers. And, and at that time, and I remember this feeling like, why are they so? I didn't understand, right. And I felt like I should be understood. So I sat down and I wrote a really, really long post to all these liberal academic types, activist, political types, some of whom are, you know, scientists about why I didn't vaccinate my daughter.

And I have that post in the dissertation. And it's really fascinating to watch my brain. Like, wow, like what is, what's happening in this post? You know?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, tell us.

**T Brown:** Um, I'm communicating to the progressive smart liberals of the world, who, this is sort of the demographic, right? And one of the things, having just reread it a few days ago that I say over and over again is, "a lot of you won't understand this."

And I talk about kind of trusting my gut. And I talk about trusting the people around me. And I talk about how, at the time I knew women who said to me that they believe vaccinations are related to autism. And they said that because they believed it, and they had seen it. So I was reflecting in this post how people that I loved and trusted had this experience and that it was part of my ethic to believe what they said about themselves.

And I specifically talk about a study that came out. And I say, I know a study just came out saying that there's no connection. So I addressed that. And I'm saying, even though I'm reading this study, I still believe these women.

And so there it is laid out in front of you.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** Like, me saying, I see, I hear what you're saying about the study, but I believe her.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** And sort of almost making that like, almost like a feminist ethic of sort of like, I believe survivors sort of thing.

**Candice Schutter:** Sure, sure.

**T Brown:** Which was really confusing.

Right?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And to me, this is one of the moments where I believe I learned a lot about how to communicate with someone who's been in a cult. Because I got, I, I wrote this thing and I got like, you know, 200 comments, responses. Lots and lots of responses. Some of them were like, you're a fucking idiot.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**T Brown:** Right.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.



**T Brown:** Um. And I remember reading them and just being like, okay, like there's no, in that place, I could not dialogue with that, obviously.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** But there were a couple people who took a lot of time respond to me. And they did it with a tone of respect.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** At least with a rhetoric of, I hear what you're saying. Here's some things to think about.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** And when they responded to me that way, it was one of the things that over time really, I believe, helped me to put my brain back together. Because I remembered these interchanges, these virtual interchanges where somebody was like, well, here's some things to think about. And, um, I wasn't defensive. And even though at the time I couldn't take in the information, I stored it somewhere.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, the shelf. Have you heard Janja talk about the shelf?

Dr. Janja Lalich.

**T Brown:** I haven't specifically, although I, I know Janja. Do you want to explain that? Why don't you take a minute.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh, just the, those who've listened to for a while, I've mentioned it before. And I think this is a good place to just insert it. Because we're, part of the reason we're having this conversation is, you know, so you can sort of unpack your experience, but so we can figure out like, how do we dialogue across these divides when we're living in this time right now? Right. And like, what works and what doesn't?

And what she talks about is the shelf, sort of in the back of the mind that when we, like in that interaction.

**T Brown:** Yes.

**Candice Schutter:** People say, here's some things for you to think about. That there's sort of a shelf in the back of the cult member's mind that things get stacked on. And it just gets heavier and heavier and heavier. And then eventually it breaks and it falls. And that's the moment when we realize.

And so that every little thing that gets put on that shelf. It seems like they're a brick wall, like we can't get through to them. But in fact, we are potentially putting something on that shelf.

And it sounds like these, this interaction was sort of loading up your shelf with things that didn't make it crumble in the moment, but made it heavier.

**T Brown:** And I, and I stored them. Which was so fascinating to me. Like,

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** So it, I like, I like that metaphor because it's like, at some point I took it, I was like, there's that thing. And I went and I took it back off the shelf. And I was like, oh.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** So, and the reason I put it on the shelf, or at least a lot of the reason was that I had had previous interactions with this person where I respected them. So I couldn't completely dismiss them.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Like in other words, there was already a relationship with these people where I was like, oh, you're a good person. And then when they came at me with respect, I didn't have to do that.

**Candice Schutter:** You didn't have to defend.

**T Brown:** So it was the relationship and the approach.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** So now I'm like that, I mean, there, there are times where you need to yell at somebody and like.

**Candice Schutter:** Sure.

**T Brown:** And you know, get the fuck outta my house.

There's also times where that approach of like, hi, that's really interesting. Um, here's some things that I think about that are.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Would you like to know how I might respond to that? Or do you care to know my experience? Like those kinds of approaches can make their way onto the shelf.

**Candice Schutter:** Well, and I think part of it, just to give you, the back then you a little credit. Also is you said, I didn't get defensive. So I think that's the thing where, I mean, I'm sure there was, defense rises up in us anytime our cognitive dissonance is being experienced. But that you didn't shut them out and go to war with them. Because you gave them the benefit of the doubt. They had to already gain your respect and trust in some way. So you remained open to the dialogue.

And so it kind of goes both ways, right? And so, sometimes when we attempt that approach, we get a firestorm back of defensiveness. And there's no way to dialogue with that, right.

So I think I wanna give some credit to the back then you, that you were able to receive and put that on your shelf.

**T Brown:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** You know, you let it in.

You let it in.

**T Brown:** I think at that point, I mean, it's hard to see the thing as gradual. Because I really believe that I got out because of COVID and because I was stuck in a house and separated from everybody. So again.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**T Brown:** But for me, the physical separation was absolutely essential.

**Candice Schutter:** Oh, I didn't even think about that. So you were normally with your group, but because of COVID, you couldn't be with your group?

**T Brown:** Well, yes. So I mean, we had lived collectively. But in like 2019, we moved to live with my mother. So when COVID happened, we lived separately. And that to me was essential. That I was safe. And I didn't have to go to. 'Cause I was every single day, all of my time spent with this group of people.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Working for the businesses, volunteering at the farm.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** I had a lot of responsibilities. It was all the time, you know? So being stuck at home. Taking breaths for several weeks. Admitting to myself that I felt relief. I think that was maybe the biggest moment.

**Candice Schutter:** Ah, yeah.

**T Brown:** 'Cause I wasn't supposed to feel relief. I was supposed to feel longing and desire to be together.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** But I felt relief. And I let myself feel it and admit it to myself. And then I had to grapple with do I feel relief? And that's when it started to really unravel.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

And so when during that process did you start to question the belief system, like something like the anti-vax?

**T Brown:** Really quickly. Really quickly. I would say that there was, I think this is really common. And actually I would just say that almost anyone who's gotten out of an abusive environment, there's a similar process. It may, it may take a long time, it may take a short amount of time. But there's sort of like, the first part is sort of like, oh, they had good intentions. You know, it, like, it's like the bargaining thing of like, yeah, they're still good. It's just not for me.

It just wasn't for me.

**Candice Schutter:** Yep.

**T Brown:** And then it was like, wait, maybe it a little fucked up.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** Wait a second. That, why did they talk to me that way? You know, it's, you sort of start to get it.

And then like, wow, maybe he was just a jerk.

And then for me, I remember a couple of conversations. Dan Shaw, who writes about, okay, so I, I'm having a

**Candice Schutter:** Narcissistic abuse. Yeah.

Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** I am ridiculously resourceful. So like, in a few months I was like on the phone with Janja Lalich. Dan Shaw was my fucking therapist. Like, I, I'm reading Alexandra Stein. I'm just devouring like, you know. So.

So, Dan said to me, what's the guru's backstory? And I told him a little bit. And, and I was like, yeah, it's, I mean, you know, that's, he's like a Sufi sheikh. And he was like, Hmm. And I go, what are you saying? He's like, I guess I would suggest consider the backstory. And I was like, what are you saying? And I'm like, you wait, you, maybe that's not real.

So there was that moment of like, what?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Yeah.

**T Brown:** And then, and then after I started doing YouTubes, then other survivors came forward and said, by the way, the women were specifically one, one woman was, and this is on the YouTube channel too, so it's not a secret. She told me about being sexually groomed by him. And then at that point I was like, motherfucker.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And then it was, this whole shit is wrong.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And then maybe six months later it was like, it's one giant con.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**T Brown:** So maybe it took a year to get to, this is one giant con.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And I do wanna say, it's never this simple, but I really feel like there's an element of, I'm gonna call it male privilege, of my ability to speak out so quickly.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Because what I've seen is that, particularly women who are most often mired sexually with the, you know, the cultic abuser dude. Often, and what I have seen, sometimes often slash sometimes that's funny, can take years to begin to articulate themselves what happened. So, so I have seen that take years for people. And um,

**Candice Schutter:** Well, and I would, I would just add, if I may, that even if there's not an element of, well there's almost always an undercurrent of sexualization going on.

**T Brown:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** But even if there's not overt like SAs, you know, sexual abuse going on, the social contracts. Because, because these environments tend to reinforce gender essentialism and like cram us into categories of masculine and feminine.

And, and so there's sort of this other layer of undoing and unraveling, like what it is to be a woman, what it is to be feminine, and how you're supposed to express yourself. And then coming out into a culture, a larger culture, that has its own gender essentialist standards that is saying the way you're doing recovery isn't quite right. You're being a little bit too whiny. You're being, oh, nope, now you're being too direct. Oh, nope, now you're not, you know, it's like.

**T Brown:** Angry.

**Candice Schutter:** You're too angry. Too all the things. And so.

**T Brown:** Don't make it your whole personality.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right. Oh my God. Yeah. Oh, I've heard that one.

**T Brown:** Fuck you.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, exactly, fuck you.

So I think that happens to all of us. I don't mean to diminish anyone's experience. But I do think there's, there's added layers, intersectionalities. Like not just women, like a woman of color as a whole other layer, you know? And there's just so much to it.

And then the aspect of. You know, the thing I was thinking about when you said the whole thing's a con. My heart broke a little bit. Because I was thinking about when you said a moment ago, I actually wrote it down. It's the only thing I've written on my little notepad so far. We've just been going with the flow.

You said, you were describing when you were in it and your relationship with your daughter and the parenting. And you said, "because I wasn't gay anymore."

**T Brown:** Uh.

**Candice Schutter:** Right. So would you be comfortable talking about that a little bit? What was happening there and what did you see after the fact and what impact did that have on you?

I would imagine it was pretty profound.

**T Brown:** Yeah.

I mean, what you just, it's, this is perfect because what you just said about gender essentialism. So I, I was brought into the group by a gay guy, a friend of mine. And, um, the vibe is hippie. The vibe is, you know, in the late nineties it was like, there weren't any red flags at that moment that we don't accept gay people. And nobody said to me, you can't be a gay person.

And this is, I write about this very intensively because there's a lot of factors around. But the easiest way to describe it is through gender essentialism. These were the men and these were the women.

**Candice Schutter:** Mmhmm.

**T Brown:** And I found a feeling of safety in this group of people. I, for lots of complicated reasons, decided to take a vow, to be part of it. And, you know, my goal was to be as close to the guru as possible. And over time the ways that I was supposed to behave as a man were, were essentialized, in the sense like they were based on me being in a male box, this male body.

And so the queer parts of me, not just my sexual expression, but also this part of me and this part of me, you know, and the kind of music that I liked and the Doc Martins that I had in New York. Like, like these elements of my queerness were gradually through the guidance but also through my own sort of trying to hyper vigilantly fit into being close to him. Those things fell aside. And it came through.

I mean, it, it's really interesting to trace it through my music. Because I'm an early, mid eighties teenager. It was Morrissey. It was punk rock. It was Depeche mode. It was a lot of heavy rock, heavy punk, like, um, British like Killing Joke. And these things were pulsing through me. These are great metaphors 'cause the guru is 10 years older than me. He's a straight guy. He tries to be a hippie and he's not a good guitar player. He, he likes simple kind of broey, 70s rock.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** And so I literally, at, at a certain point I tried to like the band. I tried to like the Grateful Dead. I tried to make myself like, to make myself like these things. And I'm like, okay, Bob Dylan. Like, okay. You know, and, and, and so I, that's, that's an example of how I tried to propel myself into this narrow essentialism, which had behavioral expectations.

**Candice Schutter:** It's like a prototype, the cult prototype, whatever it is. Yeah. Yeah.

**T Brown:** I'm supposed to like that.

And then in a million different ways, he sort of swatted, you know, whack-a-moled, my expression. You know, and that included things like when I did have attractions to men. And I never cheated on my wife. But Jesus, I had crushes. And, and some of them were visible as much as I tried to hide them.

And, um, there were certain protocols, you know, that like I could sort of confess it to this group of men that, you know. Very, very similar to Keith Raniere. He kind of created these men's and women's groups. And, um.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** So I, I had a group of men that I sort of could confess to. And so when I said I wasn't gay anymore, I didn't really say that out loud or even to myself.

It was more like. And this, you can hear in evangelical circles, anyone who was queer trapped in one of these groups. I think we say to ourselves, you know, I'm making a commitment. Either we're denying it. But if we're not denying it to ourselves, we're saying my commitment to the path is stronger than my sexual desires.

So it was sort of mind over body, which is fundamentally dysfunctional.

And he would often give me that accolade just sort of like, well, they wouldn't understand their decision that you're making, like the commitment that you have.

And, and so a very, very important moment after I came outta the group was the moment where I had to articulate again, which was so difficult and disorienting to say out loud to my wife, I am gay. And we both know that.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm. Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** But then, I started going on hikes with this man that I'm still with. And I didn't do it with the idea that I would consciously, I wasn't consciously pursuing a relationship. But I knew my relationship with my wife was going to end. And I went on these social distance hiked with this guy that I knew, 'cause we already knew each other. And I just felt different. I felt it.

**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**T Brown:** And I felt a desire that I hadn't felt. And we sat on his porch. And we were social distancing. And we sat away from each other and we took our feet and we touched our feet together. And I remember, I'm not, of course it didn't happen this plainly, but my retrospect narrative of this moment is sort of like, I felt my desire as a beautiful thing in that moment. Like, this is, this feels so good. This is just in my body. I want to be close to you.

And, and my, my poor wife for all those years, I did not feel that with her.



**Candice Schutter:** Hmm.

**T Brown:** And, um, and that wasn't nobody's fault.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** If it was anybody's, it was mine.

But, so, and this is what happened in that moment with my partner who I'm still with. That joy of feeling this congruity, alignment with my, what my body felt, right? And at the same time, rage and grief. Because fuck you, guru for not allowing me this moment. And the, and the clarity of being like, any religious leader who would deny this feeling of alignment in your body and desire.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Is a criminal.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** A violent criminal. Because, and this is something that gay straight, everyone understands. It's like, you know, it's like. Every human gets this I think, Candice. It's sort of like, that moment where you feel like, yes, you know. And you're in your body and you're present and body mind split is gone and I want to be close to this, this other body or not.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** The thing in you that goes like, this is what this body wants.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** And if there is a God, it's as sure as hell God given, 'cause it's right there.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. Well said.

**T Brown:** Does that make sense?

**Candice Schutter:** It does, it does. And it sort of circles all the way back to bringing it back to the body, like us talking about the performance piece. And sort of reclaiming that gut sense around things. Which gets colonized by the cults as well.

Like, you describing your post that you wrote to the folks that sort of explaining your anti-vax stance. And the phrase that that jumped out at me is something you just said again that

your guru said to you. Which is interesting 'cause you were parroting it. You just said a moment ago that he said to you "they wouldn't understand."

And you're, and you're saying to these people like, I get that you're not gonna understand this. And there really is this, this is where I think so much, I feel very, very strongly about this. People are probably tired of me saying it. But I feel like the whole cult dynamic thing is really born out of the colonizing supremacist headspace, right? So it's this idea of like, we know better than everyone else. They wouldn't possibly understand.

But it's also, I think a red flag for all of us to be like, when we're pulling from an ideology versus when you say, when our feet touched, my body knew what it wanted. Nobody can argue. I mean, people will try to argue with that. But that's, it's the difference between saying like, I know viscerally, I know what's true and what's real for me. And that's, that's enough. We have to recover that when we're in this place of, no, we have this ideology that we're passing everything through like a filter and other people aren't gonna get it. They're not gonna get it.

And in some way that's evidence. When you're in that head space, that's the mind fuck of it. When you're in that head space, you're like, that's evidence that I'm right, is that nobody gets it. At least that's how we saw it, is like, oh, well those poor people over there don't understand what we understand. They don't have the secret sauce that we have access to.

But in reality, that has nothing to do with our embodiment. It has everything to do with what we've been trained to think. But we claim it as if it's our identity. So it feels like, I'm sort of rambling here, but I'm just trying to speak to that conflict and how we resolve it. And having this, this moment of contact where you realize this is, this is the thing that I, that was stolen from me.

**T Brown:** Yeah.

**Candice Schutter:** Basically.

**T Brown:** Okay. What you said was really, really cool.

Okay, so the truth is when I'm saying that, when I'm saying like, you don't, you're not gonna understand this. I'm not available. Like I'm not.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** It's, it's like if you compare it, if you compare it to like the feet touching.

I'm turned away.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** I'm hoarding a thing. I'm like, well, there's this. You don't understand.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm.

**T Brown:** Like I'm, I'm identifying with this gap.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And so, God, one of the things. I mean, anyone coming out of a cult will understand how you start, you realize the lies that you were fed about all the normal people aren't true. And then you're like.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Like the people that I interacted with, like the people who worked for the bakery or whatever. When I got out suddenly I was like, oh my God, you're, I really like, hi, you're a person.

**Candice Schutter:** Right.

**T Brown:** So like that, that wasn't.

So when you're in, you can't access that.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** The foot touching. I can't touch feet with you.

**Candice Schutter:** That's fair. Yeah. Yeah.

**T Brown:** So I think what you're getting at is there's a thing that's not engaging.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** Right. Wouldn't you say?

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah. It's almost like there's a buffer that gets built between you and the world that has to be penetrated in order for that.

And I think that's important for everyone to hear right now, especially when it's like, I don't understand why people don't get it. I don't understand why people aren't seeing. And it's like that buffer has to be, you know, chipped away at. It has to dissolve of its own accord. It, it's a process, but you can't make it happen. Somebody from the outside can't make it happen. Can't make, like.

Even if your partner now walked straight into your cult one day and tried to touch feet with you.

**T Brown:** That would've been impossible.

**Candice Schutter:** That would've been impossible. Exactly. Yeah.

**T Brown:** Which is, it's so interesting 'cause like, I mean, we're surrounded by cultiness right now, right?

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** It's just everywhere.

So it's like, uh. Like I said, sometimes you just have to kick people outta your house and you have to go up against them to protect the trans people in our lives or right.

It's like, it's like there is a war.

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm. Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** At the same time, the people who are close to us, the way to get through to them is not by telling them how, what they're the idiots that they are.

I mean, maybe, I don't know. I guess that's probably not always true maybe. But I, I guess I just feel like at some point, if you're gonna get something on their shelf, it's gonna probably come through something that's said respectfully and out of love.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** And that's really hard to conjure sometimes, these days.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** When people are in danger.

**Candice Schutter:** Or it can be said, I think, indirectly. It's something that they sort of learn about and decide later, oh wait, that applied to me. Nobody said it directly to me. But when I look back.

Like that's how it's been for me as I just, you know, explore quote literature and other people's stories and stuff, and then they'll say something. I mean, even watching the, ugh, the docuseries that everybody's talking about around now, the new Netflix one on The Biggest Loser.

**T Brown:** Oh yeah, God.

**Candice Schutter:** So I'm watching that and I'm seeing the behavior of Bob and Jillian, you know, these trainers who are like barking orders at people. While I didn't behave like that, there was an interaction that Bob had with a Black woman. I think her name was Joelle.

My favorite line in the whole series is she says to the camera, like, Bob, whatever the hell his last name is, can fuck off or something. It's so good. It's so good. Because you do have to say that. Like you said, sometimes you're just like, I just can't with, I can't anymore. And he mistreated her and she has every right to say that. And I'm here for it.

And that interaction that they showed, I watched it and I'm thinking to myself, oh, I've done something similar.

**T Brown:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** Like the way that he was behaving toward her. When I was leading and involved in New Age wellness, and I really thought I had a better way. I wasn't as cruel, but the way we did it, especially as women in New Age wellness, it was a lot more manipulative. And in some ways I think darker, because it would come out sideways. The control and the manipulation comes out through this sugarcoated bullshit that we do.

And I saw myself in that moment. Now, the nobody in the documentary was pointing directly at me saying that was, this is what you did.

So I think there's something also about just the cultural critiques and commentaries and conversations like this where we can see ourselves, whether it's in the moment or in retrospect, in the stories that are told or in the dynamics that are named. And then we look back later.

And so it's putting stuff on our shelf, even if it's not being directly said to us, I guess is what I'm saying.

**T Brown:** Yeah, that's really good. No.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah, I think that's probably true. I'd like to think it's true. We need all the hope we can get in terms of what might help some folks to wake up and, and sort of join the resistance, if you will.

Especially people who really have the ability to make a difference in doing so.

**T Brown:** Mm-hmm.

**Candice Schutter:** You know?

But mostly I just feel a tremendous amount of gratitude for the way in which, through all of this, through the process of cult recovery, through the political shit storm and the fascism and the awfulness of it, for me, the thing that keeps me afloat is meeting people like you and having conversations like this. I just really resonate with the way you process it. It helps me to understand my own experience better.

**T Brown:** That's great.

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** I'm glad to hear that. I wanna say that your thoughtfulness, you made me think about a lot of different things. So, and that's been really helpful. So, and, uh, frankly, just to hear myself talk in complete sentences, because for all those years I was disempowered in all the ways. So I'm still sort of seeing myself anew as a person who can communicate and articulate.

**Candice Schutter:** Sure. Yeah.

**T Brown:** So each, each time I have a conversation like this, I feel validated. Sort of like, 'cause you believing me is just this is what we're doing here. So like you're.

**Candice Schutter:** That's right.

**T Brown:** there's a really nice exchange of just like, yeah, this and yeah, that.

And

**Candice Schutter:** Mm-hmm.

**T Brown:** anyway,

**Candice Schutter:** Yeah.

**T Brown:** I want to thank you, too. It's very, it's healing.

**Interview Ends**

**Candice Schutter:** Thanks for tuning in today. I hope you enjoyed hearing from T as much as I enjoyed sitting down with him.

To learn more about his work, visit the show notes.

**TDP #94 – Doctrine Over Person: A Convo on Cult Recovery, Anti-Vax Denialism, & Being ‘Gay Again’**

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I'll see you next time.