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Annie: Hi friends! Welcome to another episode of That Sounds Fun. I'm your host Annie F Downs. I'm really happy to be here with you today. Happy Veterans Day tomorrow, for those of you here in the US. We've got a great show in store for you today.

But before we jump into today's conversation, I want to take a moment and tell you about one of our amazing partners, [BetterHelp Online Therapy](#). You all know this about me but I am a huge supporter of finding a therapist you can connect with to help you through those moments, when you need a little jumpstart or some routine maintenance. We want to keep our mental health up and running just like our cars, right?

So BetterHelp is an awesome resource for anyone interested in connecting with a therapist. BetterHelp is customized online therapy that offers video, phone, and even live chat sessions with your therapist. So you don't have to see anyone on camera if you don't want to, cute, the soft pants. It's much more affordable than in-person therapy and you can start communicating with your therapist in under 48 hours. Why invest in everything else in your health and not your mind?

This podcast is sponsored by BetterHelp Online Therapy and our friends get 10% off your first month at betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun. That's betterhelp.com/thatsoundsfun.

Intro: Y'all, I, like many of you, am deeply grateful for the freedoms we have here in the US and even more so for the selflessness and sacrifices that the members of our armed forces and their families make in order to provide and protect those freedoms. If you're listening and you're a veteran or you're a family member of a veteran, I just want to say thank you so so much your work really matters and we are so grateful.

Today on the show, in honor of Veterans Day, I get to talk with Army Ranger Hall of Fame member, Jeff Struecker. Jeff served most of his military career with the Army Rangers and won the Best Ranger competition as a sergeant. In almost 23 years in the Army, Jeff served 17 combat deployments in five different US wars, including *Black Hawk Down*. If you've seen the movie, you know who he is. He has many awards and commendations from his military service, including the Silver Star for bravery in combat.

Jeff holds a PhD as well as many other earned and honorary degrees. He's taught leadership at every level, from undergraduate to PhD, and he is an award-winning

author with six books in print, including his most recent book, *Start Here: Why Jesus Came and How His Message Gives You Life*. I am so honored today to share with you this conversation with Jeff Struecker.

[00:02:43] <music>

Annie: Jeff, do we just call you Jeff or do we call you Thanks?

Jeff: Just call me Jeff.

Annie: Okay, if you had on your suit, your uniform and all your bars-

Jeff: Junk is what I call them. All my junk on.

Annie: ...what would we call you then?

Jeff: Well, my first few years in the Army, I was an enlisted guy, and then I became a chaplain. And in the army, no matter what your rank, they just call you chaplain.

Annie: Oh, okay.

Jeff: But I prefer Jeff.

Annie: Okay, Jeff will do.

Jeff: I have lots of titles, I just prefer Jeff.

Annie: What's the title that you have that the fewest people have in armed forces?

Jeff: Well, there's a couple of those stories in there. I'm a guy who was in *Black Hawk Down*. They inducted me into the Hall of Fame after I left the army.

Annie: Like the army Hall of Fame?

Jeff: The Ranger Hall of Fame. But you can't be in it while you're still in the military. It's only a few years later that you can even be considered.

Annie: Got it.

Jeff: So if there was like the most elite title, that would be it.

Annie: That's a pretty cool title.

Jeff: Everybody is like, "Wait, you guys have a Hall of Fame? I didn't even know that was a thing."

Annie: Can you visit it? Is it a place?

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: Where is it?

Jeff: It's in Georgia.

Annie: Okay.

Jeff: There's a huge The National Infantry Museum built right outside of Fort Benning and it is National Mall like Washington, DC quality Museum.

Annie: Cool.

Jeff: And the Ranger Hall of Fame is there.

Annie: Okay, how long have y'all been in Columbus now?

Jeff: Almost 30 years.

Annie: Wow. So you and your wife went there when you were how old?

Jeff: 18.

Annie: Y'all were 18. And you've just stayed. That is amazing. What's your involvement now in the military? I mean, you've retired from being a chaplain, but I would imagine people still call your phone.

Jeff: Yeah, of course. Almost all of my friends have some connection to the military. Not all of them, but 99% of them. You know, maybe they just did a couple of years, maybe they did a career. I married my high school sweetheart from Iowa, and the Army brought me to Columbus at 18. And when it was time to retire, we both loved the place. We wanted to stay around the military. So the reason we stayed there is just to stay connected to the military.

Annie: What made you join the military in the first place?

Jeff: Great story. I was running from trouble because I was getting myself mixed up with the wrong crowd, and I knew I was headed down the wrong road. And I grew up in... I moved around a little bit, but I was living in a small farm community. And if you don't own a farm, you don't have a future.

So I just on a whim, while I was still senior in high school, went to a recruiter and say, "Hey..." I was really asking the question: "What could you do to get me out of my hometown?" But I asked them: "What's the toughest job in the army?" And that's how I ended up as a ranger.

Annie: No, you said, what's the toughest job in the army?

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: Do you know the Enneagram?

Jeff: No.

Annie: Okay, great. I was going to say, "Do you know what type you are? I would love to know about your personality."

Jeff: No, no idea.

Annie: What is the toughest job? And you're like, "That sounds awesome." That is wild.

Jeff: I needed discipline. And I knew it at 18 years old.

Annie: We're y'all already a believer then?

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: Okay.

Jeff: Came to faith in Christ at 13.

Annie: At 13. Through what? Church or young life?

Jeff: My next door neighbors shared Jesus with me first time in my life anybody's ever really explained it to me. And it's so funny-

Annie: 13?

Jeff: Yeah. I think back on it now, because they were so nervous, they stumbled all over themselves-

Annie: Was it grownups or students?

Jeff: They were, you know, a young married couple. And they just came next door and started talking to me about something that was really important to them. Everything that they said they were nervous, they were stumbling all over themselves, but it all made sense. And later on that night, I thought about it and got out of my bed and knelt down and asked Jesus to change me.

Annie: Oh, Jeff. Just by yourself as a 13-year-old boy.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: That is such a sweet story. Now that you trace the last 30 plus years of your life, I mean, did those neighbors know the impact?

Jeff: I have no idea who they are.

Annie: You don't even know their name?

Jeff: No. I moved around a lot growing up.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: And I moved just a few weeks after this. If you're listening to this show and you are my neighbors, please reach out to me. I've been trying for 35 years to find them to tell you thank you. Because I'm sure my neighbors don't know.

Annie: Do we know anything about them? Young married couple...

Jeff: Here's a fascinating thing. Young married couple. I lived right outside of Nashville in Gallatin.

Annie: Oh, it was here?

Jeff: It was here.

Annie: Oh, we are finding them, Jeff. We are finding them.

Jeff: So if you lived next door to me in Gallatin, Tennessee in 1984, please find me because I want to say thank you.

Annie: Because they're probably what now? Maybe 60.

Jeff: Well, they were just a few years older than me.

Annie: Oh, sure. Right, right. Because they were young couple.

Jeff: So late 50s.

Annie: Jeff, we have to find them. My friend, when you walked in, one of our friends, Jamie, is helping us out with some stuff, Jamie, is the best internet stalker I've ever met.

Jeff: Oh, right?

Annie: So before you leave, we'll get some more information that we don't necessarily want to say on a podcast of like streets, and just we'll give her a go.

Jeff: I really have been trying to find them for 35 years.

Annie: Oh, I hope we can help facilitate that.

Jeff: Just to say thank you.

Annie: Yes. Because can you imagine? Their impact of that conversation that scared them led you to being one of the most influential voices in so many people's lives.

Jeff: Annie, I tell audiences this all the time. Like there's no way you can mess up sharing what you believe. Because if there was a way that you could mess it up, that couple would have done it. And everything that they said made sense. And later on that night, man, it radically changed my life.

Annie: The next morning, you wake up and what?

Jeff: Something's different, very different inside of me.

Annie: Oh my gosh.

Jeff: Listen, I was a freshman in high school when I got off the bus to come back home from school. Instead of going to my door, I went to my neighbor's door and said, "I prayed last night and something's different. You guys tell me what I need to do next because I don't know the first thing about this Christianity."

Annie: And what did they say?

Jeff: They said, "Why don't you start coming to church with us?" And then a couple of weeks later, I moved away.

Annie: Wow. Did you ever go to church with them?

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Annie: Okay, great. So we have church name, we have street name. This feels like it is in my pocket. All we have to do is find them, Jeff.

Jeff: That's right.

Annie: You didn't know when you were walking in today that we were going to solve a mystery.

Jeff: They're like my surrogate spiritual parents. And I've been looking for them. I'm their orphan son that I've been looking for thirty five years.

Annie: Yes. Oh my gracious! So when you decide to go talk to that recruiter, are you praying about that? Are you just trusting your gut of what you needed?

Jeff: I wish I did a lot of praying when I was 18 years old. I didn't. I was basically stupid and just following what sounded cool. I went to this recruiter's office with no notice and nobody in the family kind of pushing me in that direction. I pretty much skipped school that day and just showed up at the recruiter's office and said, "Hey, what do you got for me?"

They started the guy that I talked to was really honest, didn't try to sell me something. He was just like, "Look, kid, you probably don't have what it takes. But if you really think you want to give it a shot, here's what it looks like. You go home and think about this before you come back and talk to us."

Annie: What did your parents say when you told them?

Jeff: I told him after the fact.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jeff: I was 18. They didn't have to sign for me. So I told them after the fact, and my mother did not like it. She lost it.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: And just was not happy that I made that decision. But it forged me. And I used the word "forged" like iron in a fire. It forged me into the man that I am today.

Annie: Yes. When you look at your history... Will you say how long you were in the military? We kind of give people your...

Jeff: I spent about 23 years in the Army. I was an enlisted guy for about 13 of those 23 years, and then felt this very strong sense that God was leading me in another direction. I spent the last 10 years as a chaplain.

Annie: And then why do you retire?

Jeff: Well, it was time. And I kind of made a commitment to my family, and I made a commitment to Jesus, whenever it's time for me to leave, I'll take the uniform off and never look back. And there was just a moment where it was absolutely clear to me it's time.

Annie: Oh, man, will you talk about that for a second? Because so many of our friends listening are trying to figure out whether to stay or go. And often scripturally, you're told to stay way more than you're told to go. And so how did you know it was go time?

Jeff: Well, I made a conscious decision I will do this job as long as I'm not holding my friends back. Being in the army and in special operations, it's a grueling, physically demanding job. It takes a great toll on your family. But also the people that you're around, their lives are literally at stake for you to be able to do your job.

And I made the decision if I ever can't keep up with my peers, and I'm putting my friends at risk on a battlefield, then I'll leave. I also decided if it's ever too much for my family, I'll leave. And then third, when it's not fun anymore, then I'll leave.

And if there was a moment where I wasn't going to be on the battlefield as much in the future as I had been in the past, I would become now much more in an office back in kind of the rear in a safe environment. And I was thinking, "That's not fun. That's not what I wanted. I didn't join the army to do that."

Annie: Right.

Jeff: So that was for me kind of the moment where it was like, "Okay, if this is the future, that doesn't sound fun-

Annie: Yeah, there you go.

Jeff: ...I'm just going to go ahead and say it's been a good ride, but it's time to take off the uniform and hang up the boots.

Annie: It's so helpful to have those filters set up early of going, "Unless God says something, if this door closes when [fill in the blank]." Because then when you get there you go, "Oh, I said for a decade that this is when the door closes."

Jeff: I do want to say though, my first year or two in the army, I hated it. I thought to myself, "Man, I made a mistake. This is miserable." And then I just learned to really respect. I learned to love the guys and gals that I started with. And that was the moment things change for me.

Annie: Really?

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: Did you want to quit a billion times?

Jeff: Yes, of course. I mean, it's about as hard as anything anybody will ever do.

Annie: Right. I mean, not only is the military hard, you picked the hardest version of the military to be a Ranger. That is wild. Did y'all get married that summer?

Jeff: No, we had a long-distance relationship, got married about... I was about four years in the army when we finally got married.

Annie: And so were you at Fort Benning from the start though?

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Annie: Okay. And when was your first deployment?

Jeff: My first combat deployment... The army sent me all over the world to do dangerous training. But my first time in combat was 1989, The invasion of Panama. I'll give you a real quick rundown.

Annie: Yeah, do it.

Jeff: I went to Kuwait in Desert Storm in '91. I was in Somalia in '93. In *Black Hawk Down*, there's an actor who plays me in the movie. And then I became a chaplain and did—Here's the numbers—nine deployments to Afghanistan and five to Iraq in those last 10 years.

Annie: Wow. Nine and five in 10 years. 14 in 10 years. So how long are you going over each time? A month or two?

Jeff: No, sometimes it was a couple of weeks. The Rangers were sent over there, because there's a thing that just happened and you got to go over there and fix this thing. Or there's a guy who just popped up, you got to go over there and get him. But sometimes those were months or many months. So they varied from a few days to many months.

Annie: How many kids y'all have? Four?

Jeff: Five.

Annie: Five kids. So every time you're loading up, you're going through the same... What's that rhythm? What's the rhythm of, "Okay, dad's at risk again. He's going overseas again." What kind of was that rhythm for your family?

Jeff: can I just say for those of you who are not familiar with this kind of lifestyle, many people think well after 13, 14 it gets easier, right? No. It gets much harder.

Annie: That's it.

Jeff: Every one gets harder.

Annie: Because they're like you're rolling the dice?

Jeff: Yeah. Every one it was like, "Whoa, I just survived the last one and this next one, my number might come up. This is what I saw. I'm willing to do this, but now my children are getting older and now they need dad around a whole lot more than they did when they were six months. Now they're 16 years old." I mean, it just got harder and harder on us as a couple.

My wife Dawn and I, it got harder and harder on us. It got harder on our children. But they all... and this is not because of me. I think it's just because of their love for our country. They saw what they did as part of serving the nation and making sacrifices at home for our country.

Annie: Wow. So, I mean, you had to put that in them somehow. I mean, I grew up loving and being grateful... You know, I'm 41, so I was in elementary school during the first Desert Storm. We wrote letters to soldiers. I remember all of that.

Jeff: I probably got one of your letters.

Annie: Oh, my gosh, we should check. So many mysteries being solved today. So I mean, I grew up with that. But we didn't have military in my family. And so I didn't know it like your kids know it. Just from experience, did that put in them the depth of that?

Jeff: Well, I think two things probably really left an impact on them. One, putting dad on an airplane again and again and again. And even without it being said, "Hey, he may not come home alive," they realized I'm placing a lot of my future, a lot of my hopes for our country. I'm putting it at stake. And I don't have a choice because the attacks on American soil really brought war home to us, unlike foreign wars, where it was on another piece of soil somewhere else.

But the other thing I think that really had an impact on them, even though I tried to shield them from this as much as possible, is they all have friends that their father was killed. And they saw what their friends were going through. And when you're sending your father overseas on an airplane, he might not come back. But your buddy's father didn't come back from the last one. It feels a little-

Annie: And you're walking that with them.

Jeff: It feels a little bit selfish to sit there and to say, "I don't want to do this anymore," when look what they're going through.

Annie: I would imagine that families inside the military world have a real sober understanding of life and death in the way that... your kids probably are much more

capable of handling life and death than I am. Because it feels very far away from me when it happens. Even though everyone dies, it feels very unbelievable. Whereas your kids have experienced it their whole life.

Jeff: Yeah, been around it, basically, since they were born.

Annie: Especially as a chaplain. I mean, I read that one of your biggest jobs was going and saying to families, "Your son or daughter will not be coming home."

Jeff: Now I spent most of those deployments overseas. So there was another chaplain back making-

Annie: Ah, okay, sorry.

Jeff: No, it's okay. There is another Chaplain knocking on doors and what I refer to as ruining people's futures forever, when telling them, "Hey, your father is not coming home, or your mother just died in combat? I had to have some of those conversations. But most of the time I was overseas with the guys when they were getting shot at it.

Annie: It's complicated to love America sometimes because we have a complicated country and there's a lot going on that is not just. So how do you teach your kids how much is being sacrificed and how lucky we are even when there is trouble?

Jeff: One of the things I have had the privilege of seeing is the Army has sent me all over the world. And not just to combat zones, but I've had a chance to go train in really difficult or dangerous environments around the world. As a result, I've had a chance to see the way the rest of the world lives.

And I have reminded our children of this at the dinner table. We dinner as a family every night that I'm at home. And I've reminded them at the dinner table, America is not a perfect country. Far from it. There's a lot of things that need to change about our country. But I've been all over the world, and nowhere else in the world is even close to where we are right now.

So when you go to bed tonight, obviously you need to pray for our country because it's not perfect. But if you were living somewhere else, you would give your right arm—and I'm being literal now—give your right arm for the privileges that we have in America. Don't forget that is what I've kind of reminded them the dinner table.

Annie: I've thought about that a lot with what's happened in Afghanistan, and seeing the shift back of what women can't do. I have no idea how lucky I am to run my own business and to be able to do this, to talk openly about Jesus as a person and as a female. As you're watching what's happening in Afghanistan, you've put a lot of time there. What are you praying?

Jeff: Well, my prayer is for the people of Afghanistan. My prayer is for strong leaders that will step up. I'm talking about God raising up somebody in their midst, like Benazir Bhutto who led the country right next door, Pakistan, in a very courageous way. She stood up and led her country in incredible ways in a very male-dominated society.

My prayer is that the future of Afghanistan will be strong because there are leaders that will stand up and will make their stand against tyranny. But Annie, I'll tell you my first time in Afghanistan early in 2003, the war was still relatively new in Afghanistan. And then I went back there again and again, as you heard, nine times for almost a decade.

And my first few times in Afghanistan, I never saw a woman unless she was completely covered in a burqa, never ever saw a girl unless she was young enough that she didn't have to be hidden away. Women were completely isolated from the rest of society just because of the brutal Taliban regime that they grew up under. Never had a chance to go to school, didn't get a chance to get medical attention. You couldn't even step out in the street. You couldn't dance with your husband in public under those environment.

And then for about 20 years, one generation of Afghan girls got a chance to experience what their mothers and their grandmothers never got a chance to experience. Unfortunately, it's all gone back to... it's not all gone back, but much of it is gone back to the way things were in 2000 in Afghanistan. And my prayer is for the girls, that the next generation of Afghan girls will have the freedoms that this present generation had. But I don't have a lot of hope there.

Annie: You don't.

Jeff: Unless God does something really spectacular, I really don't have a lot of hope.

Annie: Is this okay to talk about this?

Jeff: Sure. Yeah, we could talk about whatever you want. It's your show.

Annie: Well, I know but you're also a person, and I don't want to ask you things that-

Jeff: No, it's all good.

Annie: Okay. I just imagine that the last few months have been you getting to pastor a lot of people through that.

Jeff: I had the privilege of pastoring a church right outside of Fort Benning, massive military community that I live in. So there's obviously-

Annie: Currently you're the pastor.

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Annie: That's cool.

Jeff: So there's obviously a lot of military in my church, just because there's a huge military. There's a lot of military everywhere.

Annie: Sure. Same as musicians in every church here.

Jeff: And during the whole fall of Afghanistan, and this was record time, I don't think anybody on the planet thought that in 11 days, the entire country would fall.

Annie: Were you shocked as you're watching it?

Jeff: Oh, yeah. Absolutely. I was so disappointed with the Afghan government that they would just hand this thing, run like cowards and let the country descend back into the hands of the Taliban. But my phone started ringing off the hook. I was getting phone calls and text messages and emails.

And finally, as a church, we just decided, "You know what? We need to stop everything and we need to talk. For one Sunday, we need to talk honestly to warriors who are asking, "Was it all worth it?" "Why did I do this if 11 days later it all goes back to the way it was?" And we spent one Sunday and just dedicated an entire Sunday to honoring warriors who they are, what they've done for not just for Afghanistan, but for the freedom in America.

Annie: Yeah.

[00:23:36] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just interrupted this conversation real quick to share about another one of our incredible partners, [Thrive](#). Y'all, I love being a member of Thrive Market. It's an online membership-based market and they're on a mission to make healthy living easy and affordable for everyone.

Since the weather has cooled off, I love that I can get almost all my soup-making staples stocked in my pantry from Thrive, while also grabbing my favorite healthy snack so I'm always prepped to grab and go when I need to. I get so excited when I see my Thrive box on my doorstep. Y'all can't even know. I get so excited.

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And now back to my conversation with Jeff.

[00:25:59] <music>

Annie: So it also makes me think of our friends who are listening who prayed for a marriage that still ended in divorce, or prayed for someone who went to rehab, and then they were out and 11 days later. How do you Pastor through such disappointment when you saw the thing go right and then it goes wrong?

Jeff: Well, the truth is, it takes two to tango in a marriage. So if you're sitting there and you're saying, "I've given it everything I got, but my husband just walked on me, and I can't make him put his work into this side of the relationship. And he wants out," I want to tell you, man, my heart breaks for you. I hate that you're in this situation. I wish nobody would ever have to go through that. But one person can't make a marriage work.

Annie: Right.

Jeff: I'm saying this now to the warriors that are listening to your podcast they're saying, "I served in Afghanistan and I've lost buddies there." And I want to remind them, hey, you and I can't control the future of Afghanistan. We can make a real tangible difference while we're there. But when we leave, what happens in Afghanistan is up to the Afghans. And unless we spend the next 150 years there, unless it becomes like the 51st state, what happens next is up to them. And it's heartbreaking, but I have no control over that.

Annie: So for those of us who, like me, who I don't have very many military families in my life, what does support look like right now?

Jeff: Well, one of the things I've tried to do after leaving the military, taking off the uniform is to just make America aware of military families. This country's very patriotic. And so there's a lot of people that will tell the guy or the gal in uniform, "Thank you."

Annie: Oh, yeah. And the airport, that must be so annoying because they're trying to walk down-

Jeff: No, no. It's actually-

Annie: ...all of us are saying stuff.

Jeff: Every single friend of mine who I know who's ever served in the military, they've always done it for the same reason. It's definitely not for the paycheck. They're not even actually doing it for the flag. They're doing it because they want Americans to be proud of them.

Annie: Oh, wow.

Jeff: So when you say thank you, it means the world. You can't say thank you enough.

Annie: Okay. I'm glad to hear that.

Jeff: But I'm trying to educate the rest of America on the sacrifices that the military family makes, because most people never... you don't see this in the movies. You don't hear about it unless you're connected to one. And when you're connected to them, you look at them and say, "Wow, look at what these guys and gals are going through and the world doesn't know."

So I'm on this personal crusade. Your listeners can help me. I really believe there needs to be a monument in Washington DC, just to the military family.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: Not to the guy or the gal that served in uniform, but to the family that stood by them because of the incredible sacrifices that they've made that most people will never ever know about.

Annie: Yeah, I don't know.

Jeff: They don't write books about it, they don't make movies about it. But America needs to know the amazing sacrifice these military families make.

Annie: Are you moving on the monument? How can we help?

Jeff: Well, what I need is a lot of people to say we really do need a monument in DC.

Annie: Okay. Who do we say it to? We need to do some sort of petition.

Jeff: Right. As soon as you have a plan, you come tell me and we will get on board with that. I would love to do that.

Jeff: All right.

Annie: Is there a way when we're praying... Because when Afghanistan fell, I thought the only thing I know... I don't have a phone number of a person who has served until I met you.

Jeff: You do now.

Annie: Yes. I have one. Which I mean there was like seven or six. Let's go Georgia!

Jeff: All right.

Annie: But I thought we could pray. That is one thing I could have done and do during all that is praying for the families. When we're praying for families whose someone they love is serving overseas, what do we not know to pray that we should be praying?

Jeff: Well, just pray for some very practical things. When the water heater breaks and one spouse is overseas... And by the way, it's not just guys. So when mom is overseas, and there's something that goes wrong at the house, now you've got one spouse there that has to be both parents has to take care of everything.

I mean, just pray for some very practical things. When the car breaks down on the side of the road, and dad is on the other side of the globe, then that families in great need. And just would you pray that God would surround them with good people that will just roll up their sleeves and be very practically there to help out.

Annie: Yeah, okay. That is helpful to me. Because I feel a little handicapped on what to do, because it's just not my community. But that helps me.

Jeff: It really is, though, every community in America because of the number of National Guard and Reserves-

Annie: Oh, sure.

Jeff: ...that are served, there is not a small town anywhere in America that doesn't have somebody or more than a few somebody who have gone overseas, which means a family or two that was back home alone while they were gone. It's every community in America.

Annie: Is Dawn listed as one of your heroes when you think about the heroes of the war to be a part of?

- Jeff:** She is the most patriotic woman in America. And she is one of my heroes.
- Annie:** I mean, because do you know over the 23 years... is that right...?
- Jeff:** Mm-hmm.
- Annie:** How old are your kids now, the five of them?
- Jeff:** They're all grown. Our youngest is a junior in college.
- Annie:** Okay. And you have grandkids?
- Jeff:** Yeah, four of them. They're awesome.
- Annie:** Oh, listen, our family just had the first grandkid.
- Jeff:** Whoa! Whoa!
- Annie:** It changes everything. It's like we've just moved into an amusement park. We're having the best time. Do they all live near you?
- Jeff:** Yeah, they all live real close. They're all living in the same community. We all see each other regularly. We all go to church together. They all see each other all the time. It's awesome.
- Annie:** So Dawn, I mean, just the years and the month she spent raising them. And it was before FaceTime. Right? I mean, now I see military guys on Tik Tok all the time. But that wasn't the case in the 90s.
- Jeff:** Well, not only that, but I'm in a special operations unit. So everything that I do is classified. And none of it can... even if the technology is out there, you can't use it because the information might get out. So-
- Annie:** The guys on TikTok are not Rangers. We're not seeing-
- Jeff:** They're definitely not in a Special Operations Unit in combat on TikTok.
- Annie:** That's right. So how did you keep up with them?
- Jeff:** I wrote a lot of letters.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: I did a lot of planning before I left just to stay engaged with them. And I wanted them to know, "Hey, even though I'm on the other side of the world, I love you. I think about you all the time. I miss you. And as soon as I come home, I'm all the way home. By that I mean, you got my full attention. When I'm gone, I don't have a choice. The country is sending me overseas, but when I'm home, I'm yours."

Annie: Can we talk about *Black Hawk Down* for a few minutes?

Jeff: Sure.

Annie: I'm sure you have to do this all the time.

Jeff: No, no, it's fine.

Annie: But I mean, when they call you and say, "We're going to make this movie, and this guy's going to play you," you're like, "Okay." Did you have a vote?

Jeff: Oh, you're bringing up this. Really-

Annie: Oh, no.

Jeff: No, no, it's fine. So I was a special operations guy. I spent my entire life trying to stay below the radar.

Annie: Oh, sure.

Jeff: I turned down every interview. Every time somebody offered to give me a chance to tell my story, my standard answer for seven years was "no comment." I'm trying to remain anonymous because my future in this clandestine unit is based on that. Then the book *Black Hawk...* well actually, the way that this worked is, if I can just take your listeners back out a second-

Annie: Let's go. I'm so into this.

Jeff: We just got back from Somalia, and my boss, my battalion commander says, "Jeff, there's a reporter. He's waiting in the conference room and you're going to do an interview." And I said, "No, sir. I don't do interviews." He said, "I don't think you heard me. I'm not asking you, you are going to go do an interview with this reporter"

for The Philadelphia Inquirer by the name of Mark Bowden." Bowden got unprecedented access.

There's an intelligence officer in the room with us. And every time Bowden asked me a question, I said, "Man, I can't answer that, that's classified." And the intelligence officer said, "No, you can answer that one." And the next question, "I can't answer that, that's classified." He said, "No, you can answer that one too." I have no idea to this day how that's happened. Bowden released a series of articles on the Philadelphia Inquirer website, which basically broke the internet.

Annie: And did he interview other people besides you?

Jeff: Yeah. So there's a handful of us from each of the units that were in Somalia that he interviewed. No one has really ever before or ever since got that kind of access.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: After these internet articles start breaking the internet, then, of course, major publishing houses go to Bowden and say, "Hey, this needs to become a book which becomes a New York Times bestseller and it stays there for a long time."

Annie: And it has your real name in it.

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: You hate it.

Jeff: And then there's a studio that comes to Bowden and says, "It really needs to be made into a movie." That's how the whole movie came about. I'm only... I'm telling your listeners something that I really shouldn't admit in public. I'm only in the movie just because I did an interview that I didn't want to do.

Annie: Right.

Jeff: So when my name started to get associated with the book, I kind of asked Bowden, "Can you leave my name out?" And he's like, "Man, I don't know. I think we're going to have to keep the real names in there." When they started talking about the movie, I was still in the army and I kind of wanted them to change my name so that I could remain anonymous.

And I got a phone call... This is why it's a bit of a raw memory for me. Because I got a phone call from a friend who's still in the Rangers, and he said, "Jeff, I'm sitting down, and I'm eating breakfast in the Ranger dining facility, in the Ranger mess hall and there is a guy sitting right across the table from me wearing your uniform and your name tag." And I said, "No way." Are you telling me that they didn't change my name, that he's really going to use the real name?" Which is how the actor ends up in the movie with my name playing me. But the guy who did it just knock the ball out.

Annie: Did you like it?

Jeff: He was so respectful and he worked diligently to get this role right. I'm so proud of what he did.

Annie: Are you friends?

Jeff: Yeah, we stayed in touch the whole time that they were getting ready to film, while they filmed it, even after they filmed it. He stayed in touch and just said, "Jeff, I just need to hear from you that I did okay."

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: "Tell me that you were okay."

Annie: Who is it that played you?

Jeff: Brian Van Holt.

Annie: Okay. Man, that is wild. Then you'd have to like watch your classified life.

Jeff: To this day, I wish they didn't use my name, but I didn't get a vote in that.

Annie: Well, you put your vote in, nobody counted it, unfortunately.

Jeff: That's a classic army for you. Yeah, we got you, but we're going to do it anyway.

Annie: Yeah, that's right. Did it mess up your future? Were there moments where you thought, "Oh, I can't do this because my name's out."?

Jeff: Yeah, that affected the rest of my Army career. It placed my name in the limelight in ways that to this day never wanted to be in the limelight.

Annie: Yeah. Because you've been on every television network.

Jeff: Just about you.

Annie: Your face is everywhere. So you're going undercover now is probably-

Jeff: It's impossible. In military communities, I don't even get in the door without people elbowing each other and whispering like, "Oh, that's the guy right there."

Annie: Jeff. I'm sorry I didn't elbow when you were coming in. I guess because we knew you were coming.

Jeff: It's a bit embarrassing. I just want to tell them like, I just did an interview, I don't really deserve to have all of the attention. I just did an interview.

Annie: Well, that's not true. You definitely deserve it. Y'all did work that the vast majority of us will never have to do for our country. So you do deserve that.

Jeff: Thank you.

Annie: So speaking of undercover, I listened to a podcast a couple of weeks ago about how the CIA is having problems now. Did you listen to this?

Jeff: Mm-hmm.

Annie: About how the CIA is having trouble because there's so much technology that makes it impossible for people to be under-covered globally. Can you talk about that at all? About how technology is changing what the military can do in those kinds of things?

Jeff: Well, I can't talk about that specifically. But I can talk about technology changing virtually everything on the battlefield. And I mean from the one-inch level of the battlefield, all the way up until space. Technology is radically changing the way every country has to look at warfare. It's scary how fast it's changing, how much it's changing. And just what you did a month ago or six months ago, may not work tomorrow because of how fast technology is changing things.

Annie: It is fascinating. I mean, I had no idea that when you talked about being undercover I know I did tell us that podcasts are like, "Oh, yeah, people video our faces all the

time now." And so 30 years ago, where you could hide in Somalia or hide in Afghanistan, now you can't write because they know your face.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: That's why I didn't go undercover with my job. Sorry. I'm too loud. I would have never. I can't even be quite on a train when someone asked me to be quiet. So then you started writing. Were you writing when you were still a chaplain?

Jeff: Yeah, I was still in the army. So the movie *Black Hawk Down* had been out. I had been asked to speak in thousands of venues, but I'm still in the army. So I had to tell 99% of them no. And more than a couple of publishing companies came to me and said, "Jeff, you really need to get your story in print. Just because you will never be able to go to the number of audiences that want you to go there." That's kind of how I started writing.

Annie: And *the road to Unafraid* is your version of that story.

Jeff: It's the first book that came out. Yeah, it's my version of what people would ask me when I'm on the road, telling them my story in public.

Annie: You're like, "You know, I'm going to quit with the Q&A and I'm just going to write it all down until you just get this and read it."

Jeff: Right.

[00:40:02] <music>

Sponsor: Hey friends! Just taking a quick break to tell you about one of our amazing partners, [Flamingo](#). I don't know about y'all but I find the abundance of options for hair removal that are available to us are a little overwhelming. There's salon waxing, which is painful laser, hair removal, which is really painful and pricey, and there's good old shaving more affordable but you got to remember to get a fresh razor head and the right shave gel.

Thankfully, we've got Flamingo and there are convenient subscription options that simplify our lives. Flamingo is a body care brand that offers a full range of quality, affordable hair removal products, like award-winning razors and easy-to-use wax kits. And this is so helpful, but if you go to shopflamingo.com/annie You get to answer a few short questions about your hair removal habits and Flamingo will suggest a customer team just for you.

And then with the flamingo subscription, everything gets delivered right to your door automatically, including blade refills that end up being less than \$2 a cartridge. I like the sound of that. You can adjust your subscription as you go or cancel anytime. It's hassle-free.

Y'all my Flamingo razors are a staple in my routine. I love the satiny feel of the handle and I love the aesthetic because it's chic and the color options are beautiful. But to get right to the heart of the matter, my Flamingo razors provide such a close comfortable shave every time. And that's the biggest reason I love them.

Ready for the smoothest transition into the holiday? See what we did there? Take the quiz at shopflamingo.com/annie to discover your custom haircare removal routine. And you'll save an extra 10% off your first order when you subscribe using the code ANNIE at checkout. That's shopflamingo.com/annie, and the promo code is ANNIE.

Sponsor: And I have one more amazing partner to share with you, [MilkBar](#). Y'all, when my team and I were celebrating the release of the kids' book, *What Sounds Fun To You?* a couple of weeks ago, one of my favorite parts of a very good day was the MilkBar cake that we shared. In fact, isn't cake just basically your favorite part of any celebration? But you know who takes cake to the next level? It is MilkBar.

Master baker Christina Tosi started MilkBar in 2008. Maybe you saw her and MilkBar featured on Netflix's Chef's Table pastry edition. I mean, y'all, seriously, she's a cake artist, and she's been wowing the world with her unique spin on iconic flavors ever since.

MilkBar is the perfect gift for anyone and everyone in your life. Some of MilkBars' bestsellers include their signature birthday cake, which we actually had the gluten-free version and it was incredible. The salty, sweet compost cookie, the MilkBar pie made from toasted oat crust with a gooey butter filling, you guys. And right now pumpkin MilkBar pie and apple cider donut cake. We had the apple cider donut cake balls, and they were unbelievable. They were unbelievable.

These are the desserts you need at your Thanksgiving or Friendsgiving table this year, or for breakfast or for lunch, whatever you want. Every MilkBar creation is thoughtfully and beautifully packaged, made fresh and then flash frozen. And they offer fast even overnight nationwide delivery. That's brilliant, right? We've had the Funfetti gluten-free layer cake for our kids book celebration. And I'm telling you, we haven't stopped dreaming about it since. It's so good.

Well, right now MilkBar has a special limited time offer. Get \$10 off any order of \$50 or more when you go to milkbarstore.com/thatsoundsfun. You'll get 10 bucks off an order of \$50 or more by going to milkbarstore.com/thatsoundsfun.

And now back to finish my conversation with Jeff Struecker.

[00:43:36] <music>

Annie: What do you know about God that I don't know from serving?

Jeff: Well, I don't know that I know anything that you don't know. But maybe I've learned a few things that are deeper ingrained in me.

Annie: Yeah.

Jeff: More than a couple of times on battlefields, I was not just concerned that I wouldn't survive, I was convinced that I was going to die.

Annie: Really?

Jeff: And those are some moments where your faith—and I'm talking to your listeners now—makes all the difference. You can play games at church all you want. But when you say, "I know I'm not going to make it through cancer. I know I'm not going to make it to see tomorrow morning," that's the moment where what you say you believe really comes to the surface.

Annie: Certainly.

Jeff: And for me, that didn't happen once or twice. That happened multiple times while I was in the military.

Annie: Jeff!

Jeff: Annie, what I want you to know is every single time God was present, God was good, and God reminded me, "Jeff, I've got you." He didn't remind me, "Jeff, you're going to survive and everything is going to be okay. And you're going to go home and have grandchildren." In fact, most of the times it felt like, "I don't know how this is going to turn out tonight, but I do know this: I got you in the palm of my hand. So you don't have to worry about it."

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: And as a result, God just showed me how good He was, how powerful that He was.

Annie: You felt that in those moments? You were like peaceful?

Jeff: My story from Somalia is when everyone else around me that had the exact same training and all of the same experiences, when they were totally terrified, I was completely calm.

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: And I was calm because I knew I'm going to die, it's going to happen in the next few moments. But I know exactly where I'm going to go and I know where I'm going to spend eternity. So why worry?

Annie: Right

Jeff: It was one of those even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil. So tonight's the night, and I'm not going to worry.

Annie: Wow. Yeah, I don't know that.

Jeff: I hope all of your listeners will hear that God is that big and that good in your life. It's not just me. He will do the exact same thing to you as long as faith is that real to you? As long as you're not just playing games with it, but you really do believe what you say you believe.

Annie: I mean that scripture in Hebrews... our friends listening have heard me say this a lot recently, because I've been on this train. That scripture in Hebrews, it says faith is being sure of what you hope for and certain of what you don't see. We don't live like that. We are waiting to see and then say, "Well, I always knew I believed, I believed. And that's not what faith is.

Jeff: But there is a moment, I think, Annie, maybe more than one moment in everyone's life where you realize, "Oh, oh, I'm in over my head. And I'm not smart enough. I'm not strong enough to figure this one out on my own." And that's the moment where if your faith is sure of what you believe, that moment, your faith gets you through that problem. If you're just playing games with it, I don't know if that faith is going to get you through it.

Annie: When you're talking, maybe as a chaplain or now as a pastor, when you're talking to these men and women who are about to be deployed, who are going overseas, how do you teach them to hold on to their faith?

Jeff: I'll readily admit, I have a huge advantage over other guys and gals when they start to talk about their faith. A lot of people in the military recognize my last name. That's a great privilege and not something that I take lightly.

And so when I'm talking to guys and gals that are getting ready to go overseas, I can look them in the eyes, and they know that this is true. I can say, "I know exactly what you're going through. I got the t-shirt, you can watch the Blockbuster movie. And I can tell you from firsthand experience how much of a difference faith makes. Let me be the guy who helps you understand before you get there what some people had to learn after the fact. You don't have to learn it after the fact. Because I've gone before you."

And it's a great responsibility but it's also great honor. A lot of people will listen to me just because they know about my background.

Annie: I mean, you're literally driving from here to speaking event, where they will believe you.

Jeff: Talking to lots of guys tonight. And they'll give me instant credibility just because they'll recognize the name. And I don't take that lightly.

Annie: I mean, that's got to be a little bit true as you're teaching your sons to be fathers, and a little bit true as you're teaching the people in your church to be people of faith is like, "I've gone before you, you can trust me."

Jeff: You are a brilliant woman. I just want to say that, everybody who's listening knows this, but I just mentioned that I have grandchildren, you've got grandchildren, and no one told me how awesome being a grandparent would be.

Annie: Oh, my parents are loving it.

Jeff: What they didn't tell me is how much this changes my son or daughter, who's now a mother or a father.

Annie: Really?

Jeff: I'm watching them change right in front of my eyes and saying, "Look at this guy go. Look at this gal. Look at the mother that she's becoming, or the father that he's becoming." This is so much fun watching what children do to my children. And it's also karma, right? I don't really believe in karma. But it's like, "Oh, yeah, you're now given the full taste of what you gave to me when you were that age. Good for you."

Annie: That's right.

Jeff: It's beautiful to watch what it's doing to my children.

Annie: I think there's something really profound about when you're in the middle of something leading people, but when you've survived something leading people. Going like, "I've been there and I am on the other side. And I can tell you..." You know, because you can't make any promises everybody's going to come home because they aren't going to go home. But you can say, "I've been right where you are." I think we should all try to do that with our pain, right?

Jeff: Absolutely. For most rebellious teenagers, you think your parents are idiots when you're 16, 17 years old. When you become a parent, all of a sudden, overnight, they become instant experts and everything that they said now makes sense. And it makes sense literally overnight, just because they have gone before you and they've learned a couple of things. And you just didn't want to hear it when you were 16, but now it all makes sense.

Annie: That's right. That's right. Well, so tomorrow, when people are listening to this, so tomorrow is Veterans Day. It's a day I want to celebrate well. What does that look like for civilians to celebrate Veterans Day well?

Jeff: I don't want to insult your audience. But I do want to make sure... many Americans confuse two holidays,-

Annie: Oh, yeah. I'm probably I'm doing that.

Jeff: ...Memorial Day in the spring and Veterans Day in the fall. Memorial Day is where we as Americans recognize guys and gals that gave their life for our country.

Annie: Got it.

Jeff: And we can't do enough to say thank you to those guys and gals. So you put flags on Cemetery headstones, and you recognize the families. We call them Goldstar families that lost somebody in combat.

Veterans Day is where you recognize the guy or the gal who actually served that didn't give their life in combat. And like I said just a few moments ago, the one thing that every single one of us want to hear is thank you. That's all you need to do is just find somebody who served and say thank you, and you have just done on Veterans Day, what needs to be done. Just say thank you to somebody who served.

And I want to personally say thank you to all your listeners who have served who are saying it's Veterans Day tomorrow. And as a guy who's been next to you, thank you for what you've done for our country.

Annie: Yeah, thank you for saying that. And thank you for serving. I recognize that what happened in Afghanistan would probably not happen here, the country falling like that. But man, if we didn't have the military we had-

Jeff: It would happen here.

Annie: It would happen.

Jeff: If it wasn't for guys and gals that are willing to stand up and to give their life it would happen here and any other country in the world.

Annie: I remember on SNL a few years ago, when the I think he's a Senate or House representatives from Texas where he said, "Say 'never forget to each other.'"

Jeff: That's right. Is that what y'all say to each other as military people?

Jeff: Yeah, yeah. I feel like one of my responsibilities as a guy who survived this big battle in Somalia, where many of my friends didn't, is I have to keep their memory alive. I have the honor of keeping their memory alive. And the way that I do that is by never forgetting, but also letting other people never forget who these guys and gals are, what they stand for, and what they've done for our country.

Annie: I wonder, for our friends listening, for Veterans Day, I just think there's got to be a way where we can find people in our community or find people online and thank them. I mean, they can reach out to anybody they find and be grateful, right?

Jeff: Yes.

Annie: I'm just trying to help equip everyone.

Jeff: Literally anyone from the World War II veteran all the way up into the guy or the gal had served in Iraq or Afghanistan. They're all around you. A lot of Vietnam veterans that are still waiting for somebody in America 55, 60 years later to say thank you. Just find somebody around you and thank them, and it will mean the world to them.

Annie: I saw so many Vietnam vets. A couple of weeks ago I went to a powwow. It was here in town. It was like an educational one. And I was surprised at how many Native Americans had served in Vietnam. I have not done that amount of learning to know that that was such a thing. That gives me a community as well that I can think of to thank.

Jeff: Boom!

Annie: Yeah. Okay. You have a new podcast.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: Are you enjoying it?

Jeff: I love it. It's so much fun.

Annie: Will you say the title of it?

Jeff: It's called UNBEATABLE.

Annie: That's right. UNBEATABLE. What do you love about it?

Jeff: The original design behind this podcast is to just say, look, everybody gets hit by some hard circumstances of life. Not everybody has the tools to get back up and to dust themselves off and to keep going. So I just decided I have lots and lots of friends that have just gone through incredible things. Not all of them are in the military.

And I want to introduce the rest of the country to my friends that have gone through incredible things, life has really hit them hard, and they got back up. And there's the title of the podcast. And became unbeatable. And I really believe everybody can be

unbeatable if you get introduced to a couple of stories that can give you some tools to handle some challenges.

Annie: I saw there was an episode or two with Gold Star families of people who've lost people.

Jeff: Couple of my heroes, a mother and a daughter who lost the father, you know, husband in combat. And wow, they've handled it so well.

Annie: How do you feel about the podcasting medium versus speaking in front of a crowd?

Jeff: It's a totally new muscle to me.

Annie: Right?

Jeff: So I really feel like this muscle needs a whole lot more exercise before it gets strong. I'm just being honest with you. I got a lot more work to do.

Annie: The Goldstar one, I was like, "You're great at this. I thought it was fine."

Jeff: No, it's because they're friends. They did this as a favor.

Annie: Jeff, listen, that is my entire podcast that everyone listening knows the only... we only have two groups of people on. People I'm already friends with or people I want to be friends. Because that's very easy to talk to those groups of people. Strangers, I'm not interested. I don't know how to do that either. So that is very challenging. I was a speaker before I was a podcaster.

Jeff: Really?

Annie: Yeah. We tour, sometimes I go and speak at events. And what's happened now that I wonder how you... we'll talk about this in like three years, is now when people call me to come speak, they want this Annie. The podcast Annie.

Jeff: Oh, really?

Annie: And I'm like, "That's not..."

Jeff: How do you do that in front of a huge audience?

- Annie:** We did a podcast tour where we did this on stage in front of people. But then when they bring me and I'm like, "Did you want me to teach the Bible? Because that's a different muscle than the voice you're going to hear doing this." So now you're offering two offerings for me, and it might get confusing. Prepare yourself.
- Jeff:** Thank you for saying that. You just encouraged me because I'm sitting there saying, "Wow, I really, really need to get stronger at this podcast muscle."
- Annie:** It is.
- Jeff:** So I'm glad to hear it's not just me.
- Annie:** No, no, no, it is two totally different skill sets. Both I find very fun for different reasons. Is there anything we didn't say that you want to make sure we cover?
- Jeff:** No, I don't think so.
- Annie:** You're amazing.
- Jeff:** You're awesome. That's all.
- Annie:** Now we're friends. Now I have someone in the military's phone number and you have mine if you need me. If there's any time, anything we can do, I know you have much bigger audiences than this, but anything we could ever do, I want to be as supportive as I can for your community and for your people. And so know that you have an open chair here.
- Jeff:** Well, just wanting to honor veterans tomorrow. That itself is all that you needed to do. Thank you.
- Annie:** Well, thank you for telling your story. And everybody can grab, I mean, *The Road to Unafraid*, but then there's a lot more books available. So I'm excited.
- Jeff:** You can find all that stuff on my website.
- Annie:** Okay. Very good. We'll link to it here. Is your church online? Can we listen to your teachings?
- Jeff:** We started a church last year before anybody ever heard the word COVID. But just before COVID.

Annie: Oh, boy. So we had no choice but to shut down and become online only for a long time. The church is called 2 Cities Church. And quick, fun fact. It actually comes from the book by St. Augustine, *The City of God*. That's where the name comes from. So yeah, you explain find it-

Annie: What made you pick it? Explain it

Jeff: Well, *The City of God*, in this book, which really influenced most of Western civilization, Augustine really was a genius, not just theologically but also in government. St. Augustine said, "All Christians live in two cities at the same time, you ultimately belong to the city of God, that's where your final destiny is. But he's got you right here in the city of man, and you're supposed to be a good citizen of two cities at the same time."

Annie: Wow.

Jeff: That's the reason why our church exists, just helping people get good at living in two cities at once.

Annie: Oh, man, I would love to link to one of your sermons, if that's okay with you.

Jeff: Sure, of course.

Annie: I'd love for people to get to hear your teaching as well. Hear that other muscle besides your podcasting muscle, which is very strong. The last question we always ask because the show is called That Sounds Fun, tell me what sounds fun to you.

Jeff: Well, I had to think about this a little bit. For me, maybe one of the most fun that I've ever had in the military was skydiving. I did a lot of skydiving-

Annie: Really?

Jeff: ...in the military. But specifically skydiving at night.

Annie: That sounds horrible to me, Jeff.

Jeff: Oh, no, no, if you've ever been in an airplane at night, flying over a city looking down at all of those lights, imagine now looking down and all those lights with no airplane underneath you. It is so-

Annie: And they're coming at you so quickly.

- Jeff:** It is so beautiful. It is one of the most amazing experiences I've ever had in my life is skydiving at night over a beautifully lit city. It's some of those-
- Annie:** When you're doing that in the military, you have to land on X marked as spy.
- Jeff:** Yes. Of course, the military can mess everything up by throwing equipment and weapons and oxygen and everything else at you. But still, it's a great ride. It's probably the most fun I ever had in military.
- Annie:** Could you guess how many times you've jumped out a plane?
- Jeff:** Up 250.
- Annie:** Oh, my God, Jeff. You barely stay in a plane at that number.
- Jeff:** I loved it. I loved it. I would much rather jump out than land. I've said that for decades.
- Annie:** Really?
- Jeff:** I would rather jump than land in an airplane.
- Annie:** You've jumped out of a plane 250 times at least?
- Jeff:** Yes.
- Annie:** That is wild. That is absolutely wild.
- Annie:** There's some guys and gals out there that have done it tens of thousands of time.
- Annie:** Wow. How many times of that you think is at night?
- Jeff:** Probably most of them.
- Annie:** Oh, sure.
- Jeff:** Because the US doesn't just play games with the parachute operation. We're getting you ready to go jump into a dangerous place somewhere late at night where nobody else was... they're not even awake when you land there. So I would say three-quarters of them are at night. Maybe more.

Annie: It's probably a little... This shows you my military brain. Probably a little dumb to think you jump out of a plane in the day because then the enemy's like, "There's some guys falling."

Jeff: "Hey, look at these guys. Let's shoot them while they're still in the air."

Annie: "Is that a plane I hear? Look at the guys fall." Yeah, that obviously does not make all the sense. Sorry. I have one more question. Have you been to the 911 Memorial Museum?

Jeff: Yes. Very powerful.

Annie: It's amazing. My friends and I decided to walk through the bin Laden part where they really go through the whole raid and the whole thing. And watching... You may remember this but on the floor, they outlined the whole military movement and how they flew back and forth between Pakistan and Afghanistan, and where the helicopters landed. You've been a part of a thousands of those. And I was blown away watching it on the floor.

Jeff: It really is. There's no way to describe just how impressive the US military is. And that raid will just showcase the capabilities of the US military.

Annie: Yes. And when things went wrong and they're just fine. One of the helicopters crashed...

Jeff: "We'll figure it out. We'll figure it out."

Annie: Forgive me for not knowing, but as I was watching, I was like, "One of the helicopters crashed in bin Laden's backyard. How did we survive all this?" It's amazing. It was amazing. The military is... we are so lucky. We're so lucky.

Jeff: Yeah.

Annie: So thank you for doing this. I'm so grateful.

Jeff: Good to be with you today.

[01:00:21] <music>

Outro: You guys, isn't he incredible? Oh my gracious! We were just blown away by the whole conversation. What a gift! What a great guy! And yes, we are absolutely on it, trying to help find his neighbors from Gallatin. Don't worry. I've already got Jamie on it. We're going to figure it out.

Hey, be sure to grab any of his books that you want. But the latest one is called *Start Here*. And go follow him. Tell him thanks so much for his service. And thanks for being on the show.

If you need anything else from me, you know I'm embarrassingly easy to find any Up Downs on Instagram, Twitter, Facebook. All the places you may need me, that's how you can find me. And I think that's it for me today, friends.

Go out or stay home and do something that sounds fun to you. I will do the same. Today what sounds fun to me, man, I'm just going to follow up with Jamie and see how her research is going into finding Jeff's neighbors. I'm very excited about this.

Y'all have a great couple of days. We'll see you back here on Friday with an all-time favorite back with an incredible conversation. Our friend Michael Donaghy. We'll see you guys on Friday.