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0:00:00.0 Nicole Antoinette: I'm Nicole Antoinette, and this is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. As I shared last week in our short little minisode, we are in the sweet and tender wrap-up phase of this podcast, friends, which will be ending on July 21st. There will be a wonderful episode every other week until then, starting with today's conversation, in which you'll get to meet my friend Kenneth Mackins.

0:00:25.4 Kenneth Mackins: My dad was not a dad to me either. I didn't miss it because I left him when I was three, so I didn't know him, but later in life, I did have a few bouts of crying about the lack of that in my life. So I obviously just... I try to be the best, loving, fun, thoughtful daddy that I can be to him, whether that's, "Do you wanna go kick the soccer ball around, or do you wanna paint," type of stuff, or whatever it is. I just want him to have a feeling of comfort in me that I always watched my friends with dads around and just be like, "Oh man, his dad could just pick him up from school, my God. [chuckle] I wish I had that." so I just hope to be that for him.

0:01:20.9 NA: Kenneth and I have been friends almost 20 years, and this conversation is a deep dive into the wildly different life choices that we have each made in those two decades. Kenneth and his wife have been together for 14 years now. They have one kid with another on the way, and he works for a US-based multinational corporation in human resources. Basically the opposite of my life. He shares honestly about prioritizing a more stable path, what the transition to fatherhood was like, how tough it can be to feel successful enough and to even define what that means, what is successful enough, and lots more. Kenneth is such a beloved person in my life, and I hope that you enjoy this conversation as much as I did.

0:02:00.9 NA: That will start for you in just a moment, but not before our truly incredible Patreon community, the 400 plus people who have made this listener-funded show possible for the past six years. I was really uncertain back in 2015 of whether or not a listener-funded show that could eventually pay everyone involved, the guests, the sound engineer, the host, the transcriptionist, if that was even possible. Creating this podcast in this way felt like such a huge leap into the unknown for me, and the people in my Patreon community who took that leap alongside me are folks for whom I will always be deeply, deeply grateful. And even though this particular podcast is ending, our Patreon community is not.

0:02:43.7 NA: Those folks and I are currently in the fund process of co-creating the next phase of this work together, and it would be a delight to have you join us if you feel drawn to a space that prioritizes honesty, intimacy, and possibility with monthly essays, live gatherings, audio content and more. That community operates on a sliding scale with all tiers getting access to absolutely everything, and you can find us at patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. That's patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. Okay, friends, let's get into today's episode. Alright, we are good to go. Kenneth, welcome to the show.

0:03:20.9 KM: Thank you very much, thanks for having me.

0:03:23.1 NA: I feel like you are someone that I always, in my head, use your full name. It's not, it's like Kenneth Mackins, and then that makes me think of high school, you getting announced for football, "Number nine, Kenneth Mackins!" It's this whole title in my head, it's never just your name. [chuckle]

0:03:38.6 KM: Oh, well, thank you.

0:03:43.3 NA: It was number nine right? That's a correct memory?

0:03:43.4 KM: It was number nine, absolutely.

0:03:43.3 NA: Yeah.

0:03:43.4 KM: Yeah, yeah, number nine, Kenneth Mackins. That's me. Yeah well, half the time I refer to you as Lauren in my head. So that's an interesting one. You remind me...

0:03:54.0 NA: Yeah I was... Remember in high school when you used to call me Lauren? What was that about?

0:04:00.7 KM: [laughter] I had hung out with a friend of a friend, this group of people, and there was this person named Lauren there, who I met, but... Honestly, it must have been a week before I actually met you for the first time. And when I saw you, I was like, "Oh Lauren, ha ha ha," and for some reason, you didn't tell me I was an idiot and not to call you that, so I thought it was a funny joke for a bit.

0:04:21.4 NA: Yeah. Great joke. Solid burn, man.

0:04:24.5 KM: [chuckle] It wasn't a burn, you just... You were the better version of this person that I met, so I was excited about that.

0:04:30.5 NA: Aw, well thanks. Well then maybe you should have called her Nicole.

0:04:33.2 KM: I never really saw her again or I would have though, for sure.

0:04:36.0 NA: There you go, there you go. I am the long-lasting Lauren. [chuckle]

0:04:38.8 KM: Exactly.

0:04:39.8 NA: The everlasting Lauren. The other thing that I remember, I mean many things from high school, but I remember that you used to call me Lauren, that you used to give me a really hard time about everything, and that you used to tell me that I had dainty wrists. Do you remember that?

0:04:52.3 KM: Yeah, [laughter] that is so funny. Yeah. Well, that's good, you know? Yeah, I did, and it must have been... You never really grab people's wrists, but something must have happened

where I shook your hand and saw your wrist and I was like, "Oh wow, these are quite dainty." They just look fragile. It's not that it was a bad thing to be, I just wanted to be more careful around you.

0:05:16.1 NA: That's great. You wanted to be really careful of my wrist situation. Yeah, I'll still think about sometimes in the shower and I have my hand on my wrist and I'm like, "Oh, remember when I had dainty wrists 20 years ago?"

0:05:27.0 KM: Yeah, I find myself adjusting my watch band outward. If you can keep yours the same and dainty then more power to you.

0:05:34.8 NA: There you go. Here's a random question to put you on the spot. What's one of your favorite things about our friendship? Let's just go there.

0:05:39.7 KM: Wow, man. Favorite things, favorite things. Other than the longevity, I would say that I like that you and I, at least back when we first met each other, were so different from our friend group. I don't know what that means really, but just... We could talk about the BS and joke with each other a lot, and like we just got each other. That's kind of what I look in people today, the people who I get along with are the people who get my sense of humor. The fact that you get me is like, yeah, I can actually talk to and mess around with Nicole, 'cause she actually understands that I'm not being a jerk.

0:06:24.1 NA: Yeah. I know I've said this to you before, but... And I don't know when it's gonna happen, but I'm actively very excited for you to meet my partner because I feel like there's a sense of humor thing, very high on the bullshit scale, that you guys both have in common that I... You are someone who when you start saying something in my head, I'm like, "Is this real or is this bullshit?" And that's a question that I actually ask Jen all the time. He'll start talking and something will ping for me and I'm like, "How much attention do I have to pay to this?" And I will look at him and say, "Is this real or is this bullshit?" And then he has to tell me, and then that changes how I listen to it. I'm almost nervous for [chuckle] you two, I feel like I'm gonna get ganged up on quite a lot.

0:07:00.2 KM: Yeah, well, yeah, if that's how you feel about him, that's the story of my life. People always thinking that I'm being sarcastic. Half the time I am, so I don't fault them, but when I'm with my wife, people just listen to what I say and then look at her [laughter] for confirmation, like "Is this a real..." Yeah, I think a lot of it is my voice, I tend to just sound like I'm being a radio announcer when I'm telling people stuff, and so it just sounds like I'm joking around with them.

0:07:30.2 NA: You do have a good radio voice, maybe this is your career change moment coming on a podcast.

0:07:35.1 KM: Thank you. Yeah, listeners stay tuned for me to launch my own podcast.

0:07:39.6 NA: Oh my god, what even would your podcast be?

0:07:43.4 KM: I don't know. Whatever it would be I'd get in trouble for it, I know that. I'd say

something that would...

0:07:49.2 NA: Yeah that's probably true.

0:07:52.1 KM: Misrepresents my company or my family or my [chuckle] significant other in some way that gets me in some sort of trouble.

0:07:57.7 NA: Cool, so I will try to reign you in today. One of my favorite things, this is like a tiny thing, there's obviously more about you that I love than this, but I like that you are such a phone person. I feel like other folks in our, I don't know, age demographic and maybe a little bit younger, it's a thing of like, "Oh my God, don't call me, just text me." The people don't wanna talk on the phone. I, not surprisingly, love talking on the phone, and my communication style is random middle of the day phone calls, like let's not schedule a call, just, I'm gonna call you at some random day at 8:30 in the morning, and you're so down for that, and I feel like that is one of the reasons we've been able to stay in such good touch.

0:08:32.6 KM: Yeah. Yeah, thanks I would say. I obviously utilize text messages all the time, but there are a few people that just... I kinda just wanna talk to you, and whether it's with an actual agenda, something that I wanna talk to, or just the feeling of using your mouth and feeling what people are saying through how they sound. Yeah, that's being lost on people, and I enjoy that. Hence why Jonathan and I talk on the phone almost every day.

0:09:05.6 NA: When I, so yeah... You and Jonathan are my longest time friends. I'm not really friends with anyone from my childhood, I moved around too much. I'm oddly not in touch with anyone that I went to college with, and no one else really from high school, it's just the two of you. And when I found out, this is a couple of months ago, when I found out that you two talk on the phone every day, I don't know why I found that to be so delightful, but that's one of my favorite things now to know that I just imagine you just like little old ladies just on the phone every day.

0:09:34.7 KM: Yeah, That's basically it, yeah. [laughter]

0:09:38.1 NA: It's great.

0:09:38.5 KM: Yeah, yeah, no, we actually started talking on the phone in college. Not as regularly because you had minutes on your phone and you would run out, but...

0:09:49.1 NA: Oh god, remember that?

0:09:51.2 KM: Yeah, exactly.

0:09:53.5 NA: Only calling people after 7:00 PM because that's when you had the free nights and weekends. Are we dating ourselves right now? [chuckle]

0:10:00.1 KM: Good thing at least I was still on the West Coast, moved down to the East, but...

Yeah, we started talking about whatever. Usually it was his girl problems, like, "I met this girl, I'm not gonna actually talk to her though." "You should talk to her." "Nah, she doesn't seem into me." And then, yeah, it just keeps going to this day. I think moving myself, when we moved to the East Coast and obviously increased that, 'cause I don't see him ever, but... Yeah, no. I love talking on the phone. It's good.

0:10:28.0 NA: The art of the long-distance friendships.

0:10:31.5 KM: Yeah. You realize which friendships really count.

0:10:34.6 NA: Yeah. I feel because I've moved around so much, a lot of my friendships are long-distance. And a lot of my friendships tend to be... Obviously, we're talking about a mutual friend right now, but I don't really have a friend group so much. In Bend a little bit that I have friends that know each other in a group that would come together for some activities or holidays or something. But for the most part, I have really strong individual friendships with people who don't know each other, which is fine, and also sometimes could be a little bit more work because there's no kind of group togetherness and you're right, there definitely... There are only so many of those types of relationships that you have the capacity for.

0:11:10.9 KM: Yeah, yeah, yeah, true. And it could be hard having that individual... A lot of individual friends, rather than a single group.

0:11:20.3 NA: Yeah.

0:11:22.1 KM: Because I have a smaller group of friends that the effort of getting together, it's not just me trying to make it happen, right? You have six other people who are giving a little bit of effort to it, so it happens a little more easily that way, but it doesn't happen enough.

0:11:40.8 NA: Okay, so getting in the time machine, going way back to before we met... Yeah, whatever the time machine noises are, I don't have that kind of podcast, but feel free to make time machine noises if you like. What was your childhood like? Tell me a little bit about your family and who little Kenneth was.

0:11:57.9 KM: Yeah, I'm from Virginia actually, and my parents got divorced when I was three. And my mom's parents had moved to California years before. So when my mom needed somewhere to be, she took myself, my brother who's two years older, and my sister who's six years older to California, and we lived with my grandparents where... I thought it was like a month or something. And then I realized it was about two years, we lived with my grandparents in Thousand Oaks, where you and I ultimately met. And yeah, just lived with a single mom for my entire life to going to college. We were... I would say... I'd say poor, but thinking back on it and what I am able to provide for my family now, yeah, I'd say we were probably poor, but... Yeah, played the sports. I was a horrible student always, never... I had massive ADD. I took... What is it called? Not Adderall, but the other one, Ritalin for about a year or so. But my mom said it turned me into like a zombie, so she took me off of that, and I just sort of struggled through it, hardly, I didn't really give effort

towards school until my senior year.

0:13:18.4 KM: By that time, it's kinda too late. So luckily, I ended up with a football scholarship that got me to college on the bare minimum academically, but yeah, so... Gosh, more about my life though, growing up, little Kenneth, I was a horrible little kid, like when life's... [chuckle] Yeah, I was the energetic kid who wouldn't stop jumping off of stuff or touching stuff or pushing the limits, right?

0:13:44.2 NA: That totally checks out. Yeah.

0:13:45.1 KM: Yeah. And that is my son today he is that...

0:13:48.0 NA: I was just gonna say... I was just gonna say, are you getting pay back right now? Is Winston just jumping off everything?

0:13:53.3 KM: 100%. Yesterday my wife... I came into the room and she's like, "You should have just seen Winston, he was going over to the drawer that you had just told him not to open, and he went to open it." I said, "No," and he shook his head, "Yes." And then reached for it and then walked away. [chuckle] So yeah, now I'm getting it back. Everyone always told me this would happen and it's happening. I'm excited, I like seeing myself in him, I just hope that I can get him to focus before I... Before the time in my life when I started to really focus on improvement... Whatever that be.

0:14:31.7 NA: Yeah, I'm interested... So going back, when you said, I guess, however you define being poor or maybe compared to... When you think back on that now, are you thinking... 'Cause I know you said compared to what you're able to provide for your family now, did you feel that in comparison to the people who were around you? Did you think that at the time? Where was the point where you were like, "Oh, okay."

0:14:55.3 KM: Yeah. Yeah, I think we went to middle school, 'cause is when I really noticed it, 'cause my elementary school was very much the people who lived in the apartments and smaller houses near my home, so people might have lived in a house but it was a smaller house, and I wasn't like impressed, it was the same size as my grandparents house. I only went to middle schools when we ended up mixing with the people who were from the more affluent areas of our city and so then you realize, "Oh, this person has new shoes every day, or they have two pairs of shoes," I would get literally three outfits per week... Per year, so I have three different outfits per week, I'd have to rotate it. And a pair of shoes for the whole year. And just seeing someone who had two different pairs of shoes, was amazing to me. I was like, "Oh my gosh," so that's when the complex of having less than people really set in. I was friends with some of those people, I got through it. But that's when I really noticed. It was more comparative. We had food always, thinking back on it, it was a lot of spaghetti, a lot of hot dogs, a lot of Hamburger Helper, but as I got older, my mom progressed in her career and that changed as well too, but in the beginning, it was not tough for me, but... Not tough for me, in terms of what I had, was provided, but tough for me, to just sit there comparing myself to everyone.

0:16:27.7 NA: Was that something that you ever talked about with any of your peers, or was it something that you felt ashamed about? I'm asking because it's interesting hearing you reflect on this now. My family or my parents had quite a bit of money and were quite affluent up until basically high school started, they lost everything, filed for bankruptcy, and that's when we moved to California. So the convergence point, when you and I met in high school and the same thing, we had a place to live, we had food, there's obviously a huge spectrum when we talk about access to resources and stuff, but I felt very acutely aware of the different class that we were in than we had been, and then very much so a different class than the peers and friend group that... Especially at the friend group that we were a part of right? And going over to people's houses and just being very aware of what they had, what their parents had, what they could afford, the kind of vacations and stuff that they went on, and I never talked about it with anyone and felt...

0:17:25.0 NA: I remember senior year, my mom worked out some kind of a deal... And we went to a public school but my mom worked out some kind of a deal with the school because we couldn't afford for me to go to prom or graduation tickets or any of the kind of expenses that come with a traditional high school graduation experience, and so the school covered all of that, and I just remember feeling like, "Oh my god, I don't want anyone to find out." And now... I don't know, I feel a lot of tenderness and kind of sad for that version of myself, that she felt really alone and embarrassed about something that you don't need to be embarrassed about. So I'm interested in how you were feeling about it.

0:18:01.1 KM: Yeah. Gosh, no, I never talked to anyone about it because by the time I even got to know you, I figured out how to cope with it, meaning knowing you seeing... "Oh, she lives in an apartment too. Wow someone else is like me." But yeah, I guess as kids you just think if you say to your friend, "Wow, your house has five bedrooms," that they would just think, "Oh, poor Kenneth, what do you know?" And you just don't think your friends will understand and be excited with you or empathize with you. So, yeah, you just don't talk about it, unfortunately, because I think that our friends that we were friends with, they would have been totally accepting and cool and helpful if we needed anything. But, yeah, there's just an unfortunate shame of everything in your life at that age, if you don't know someone else is going through it. You have a hair coming in and growing on your nipple and you think you're an alien, and you find out all of the students have this. [chuckle] Who knew? We never actually talked about it, and that's why I never know. Yeah, never talked about it. It would have probably made life a lot easier, but if you realize...

0:19:21.1 NA: Talking about money and talking about body hair, great, that's how you're gonna raise your kids. Awesome.

0:19:24.5 KM: Seriously, whatever your problem is, talk about your problems. Right?

0:19:30.2 NA: Yeah. Yeah.

0:19:31.1 KM: Whatever that problem is, talk about it because your best friend is probably going through the same thing and doesn't actually... Hasn't told you about it yet.

0:19:38.7 NA: Yeah. I feel like, in this period of time, that we're talking about financially for me was really impactful and definitely shaped a lot of my interest in financial literacy and learning this stuff for myself and realizing I don't have a safety net and I am paying for everything myself and there's... And it made me want to talk about money a lot more openly with people in my life, and I'm very grateful that that's now part of my adult life. But do you talk about money with your friends now?

0:20:05.0 KM: I do now.

0:20:06.4 NA: I know we do, obviously.

0:20:07.6 KM: Yeah. I bought our... Well, we bought our first house four years ago. And when we did it, I was googling stuff. My mom never bought her home, her condo. She was in... And so my grandfather had bought a few houses, my aunt and uncle had, so I googled stuff, and I called them. "Now, a loan, does the interest rate change? How much do you have to put down?" I don't even know what you should typically put down on a house, I'm googling it. I'm asking our friend, Jonathan, and he's like, "I don't know. They say this percent. They say that percent." It's just this... It's this taboo subject that we're just afraid to talk about. It's not your private parts. It's literally something that could screw you for the rest of your life if you make the wrong decisions.

0:21:03.1 NA: Right, this is not a nipple hair.

0:21:04.6 KM: Exactly. [chuckle] And people know that you save up tens of thousands of dollars for a house, it's not some secret, so why is it so shameful for me to say, "Hey, guys, I have only saved \$32,000. Is this enough?" And have that conversation? But, yeah, it was hard. And ever since that, and then our friend Jonathan now buying a house, I try to talk to him about as much of the stuff as I can, if not just to bounce stuff off of him to see if I'm crazy or not, whether that'd be refinancing a house, or investing in something, or do I just keep stuff in a savings account, or do I invest in the market? And if I invest in the market, where do I even start?

0:21:50.3 NA: Yeah. Yeah. And that's, yeah, something that you and I have been talking about this year. I remember my friend, Iris, when she sent me... She and I both use a software called YNAB, You Need a Budget, it's like budgeting software, that we both love and are very budget nerds. And she sent me a breakdown of, like, "Here's all my budget categories." And I don't even know that there were numbers attached to it necessarily, but it was this kind of vulnerable, "Let's share what our financial priorities are," what even are the line items in your budget? And it felt like such a sweet, lovely, and unique get-to-know-you thing that's made me curious, like, "Oh, my God, I wanna see everyone's budget," again, with or without the actual money, but I'm just so curious what people spend their money on and... Yeah, having that have a place in friendships to talk about.

0:22:37.8 KM: Yeah, yeah, right. I'm not familiar with the app you're talking about, but I had created this spreadsheet... It was actually after we bought our house, because we used all of our cash for the downpayment and then basically furnished the house, or half of it, with a credit card with the

intent to pay it back in about a year. But it got deeper than we thought it would, and so we really had to just budget and we put line items for stuff, and we were like, "Look at all this other junk we're wasting our money on." And it was quite eye-opening to do that. So, yeah, just having a budget and seeing what you're spending your money on is not all wasteful, which it's not fair to say wasting money, is really eye-opening and can help you... It helped me pull back on certain things that I was wasteful with.

0:23:30.8 NA: What's something that you totally love spending money on that's really worth it to you? And then what's something that you realized, "Oh, spending money on this doesn't really make me happy. I don't really care, I'm not gonna do that anymore."

0:23:40.5 KM: Gosh. I don't know. Garage stuff, air quotes, for those watching this on video.

[chuckle]

0:23:52.9 NA: As there's no video, sure, yeah.

0:23:57.4 KM: And I say garage stuff, meaning bicycles, scooters for myself and/or my son, lawnmowers, rakes that will then make an improvement that I can say, "Yes, if I buy a bicycle, that will improve my life and make me happier or get me more exercise." I have no problem buying some of that stuff. Actually the hardest thing for me to pay extra money for is food. Yeah. As aware of the benefits of healthy food as I am, it's just still hard for me to buy a kombucha that's \$3.50, even though it's way better for me than drinking a soda. I'm just still like, "Ugh, gosh." And I buy them all the time.

0:24:45.0 NA: That's interesting. Why do you think that is?

0:24:47.7 KM: I don't know. I think that through college, I ate... I ate hot dogs and chicken and rice for 90% of the meals that I cooked myself in college. And one of those meals is about \$1.25. If I'm eating four hot dogs with only ketchup and mustard on them, you buy them at WinCo, the cheapest place ever, and... Yeah. The most it's \$1.50 for that meal, and I was surviving quite well on that. So today, with my 35-year-old body, obviously I can't eat that stuff as frequently. Yeah, it still kills me to go to the grocery store and spend more than \$150, even though it's for two weeks or a week worth of groceries.

0:25:36.3 NA: Yeah. That's interesting. I have been thinking, for the last, what, year or two, other than a couple of months, I haven't paid rent because I've either been living in the van, which is rent-free, and I don't have a vehicle payment, it was paid for in full. And then during most of COVID, living with my partner's dad, and that also was free, he doesn't have a mortgage on his house and let us live there for free, which was incredible. And I almost feel like it's fucked me in that now I'm like, "I never wanna pay rent, I never wanna have a mortgage." It's almost like, when you were saying, "Well, I used to only spend a dollar per meal." Once you realize that you can get away with spending less on certain things, I don't know. [chuckle] I know it's not exactly what you said, but I keep thinking, "Man, what would it take for me to be like, 'Yes, I am willing to pay for housing.'"

0:26:25.6 KM: Yeah, yeah. No, going through the same thing of eventually buying a new car. We haven't had a car payment for about two and a half years. And to think, "Oh, my gosh, we're having another child, but we still need a new car. No, we don't need it yet." That's gonna be a lot, a big internal struggle to add that extra cost to your life. Right?

0:26:46.8 NA: Yeah. You've been married for, what, nine years now?

0:26:52.3 KM: Yeah. Nine years, yes. Nine years in March.

0:26:57.2 NA: And together with your wife for about 14 years, yeah?

0:27:01.8 KM: I am doing math. Yes. '07 is when we met, yeah.

0:27:04.4 NA: Yeah, 14 years. First of all, that's an unfathomable amount of time for me to think about being with one person, so congrats on that.

0:27:13.5 KM: Thank you.

0:27:14.7 NA: Why is marriage something that you wanted?

0:27:18.3 KM: I don't know if it's something that I grew up saying, "I'm gonna marry this person and everything is... We're gonna have the house with the white picket fence." But I think... I had a girlfriend, a serious girlfriend in college, my junior year, and I kind of let the relationship go longer than it should have. I ignored red flags... Not red flags, she wasn't a bad person, but just relationship red flags, like this, "I'm not happy doing this, but I'm just doing it 'cause it's convenient." And when I ended that, I told myself that whoever I meet next, as soon as there's a red flag, think about it and then get out because it's just... You're wasting their time, and you're wasting your time, and at the same... And all during that, you're building up some expectation of something that you know ultimately isn't going to be there.

0:28:16.0 KM: And the next person I met was my now wife. And I just went through my little phase of, "Hey, if you see a red flag, pull out, stop it." And it just progressed and progressed. And I finished school a year or so before her, about two years before her, a year or so into our relationship, and we were like, "Hey, let's do this long distance." I didn't think that I was gonna be there at that point, at that step when it came to me graduating. But when the time came, it just felt right to do it. And then before she graduated, we kinda planned on her moving in with me. And when I saw her moving in with me in my head, I was kinda like, "Yeah, well, I think I do wanna marry this person." Not that I had some list of things that she must check off for me to get to that point, but it just came to me. Yeah.

0:29:25.7 KM: So then I asked her mom if that was cool, and I got the okay. Don't know if I would have still done it if she said no. I don't think she would have said no, but... Yeah. Then maybe five or some months after she graduated, she had moved in, I proposed. And as you can see, she said,

"Yeah." [chuckle] And it was just... I don't know. It was just something that grew into happening and just was exactly what we wanted, I wanted. And it has continued to be something I wanted to this point, but... Yeah. This is one of the things when you ask, "Why do you love someone?" I don't know. I haven't written down a list, it's just this feeling and it's good. And almost everyone in my family, my mom's sisters, and then my dad's brother and sister have all gotten divorced. So my life, everything in my life, the marriages that I knew most, have all ended. I'm not in this... I'm surprised I'm not afraid of marriage more, but also I see... I think I learned from all of their marriages as well. And so I'm maybe not afraid of it myself.

0:30:48.5 NA: I remember a couple of weeks ago, we were on the phone and I had the realization that in the time that you and Dominique have been together, I started and ended a three-and-a-half-year relationship, then had a five-year marriage, then got divorced, and have now been with my current partner for over two years. And that's... Just when I think of the amount that I have changed and grown, the amount of decently length, serious relationships that I have had in that period of time, it just feels... It feels so wild.

0:31:15.8 NA: And this might be a question that is hard to answer along the lines of why do you love someone, 'cause it's quite a big question, but I'm interested in the growth and evolution of your relationship, of your marriage, how you've been able to grow together over such a long and formative period of time in your 20s and 30s. I know we changed so much during that time. I'd love if there are any specific examples that you can give of a few key growth points for you two. When you think about times when the relationship had to evolve or when you went through periods of struggle and had to navigate that, what comes to mind for you as an example?

0:31:53.0 KM: Yeah. And I know we've talked about this a little bit the other day, but I need to think about this stuff is... She graduate... One, she's more mature than I am. Generally, she's mature for her age, even though now it's not a big difference, but at the time she was three years younger than me, or is. She's more mature. I'm less mature for my age, so we probably matched up perfectly at the time where when we started dating. And then... You know that... Yeah, 'cause like you said, people, when they meet so young, they can grow apart so easily. But when she graduated, she started nursing school, she was working part-time and nurse... And going to school as... I was kind of supporting us. And then after she... That kind of kept us together and growing together, figuring out, how do you as a young couple survive when one of you is literally the breadwinner.

0:32:56.6 KM: It's weird to say it now, but we actually had this conversation the other day about, like, "Hey, there was a time where I was just fully supporting you and it was never a problem." And you hear so much about, "God, I'm just tired of you not doing anything," from someone's spouse, "and I'm putting in all this work." There was never an issue. Maybe it was 'cause we were just having so much fun together, maybe it was just because I understood it was temporary. But then she graduated school, I got laid off from my job. She didn't get a job right away, but it turned into, like, "Oh, now I'm the vulnerable one, 'cause I got laid off, now we have to figure this out together." And we were both scrambling to get it done, figuring out... "First jobs we get, we're gonna get these jobs."

0:33:44.6 KM: She actually took a job up in Fresno, California, so we were gonna move to Fresno, and I didn't have a job. I was just gonna move up there, "Let's figure it out together." And then a week after she got her offer, I got a job at my current employer down in Southern California, and we were like, "What do we do?" She was a school nurse, so we're like, "Let's do it for nine months." So I moved in with my grandparents, she moved in with her mom, and we drove to see each other every weekend, about.

0:34:19.3 NA: Wow.

0:34:20.8 KM: Yeah. So I just feel like we've... And then she moved down, we went through that growth period together of us finding an apartment in Westchester, then we moved here to South Carolina a year and a half later. We've just been going through big steps of figuring stuff out together. A lot of big gains that required big teamwork. Maybe that's what's kept us going through it together and being our own champions and just staying. I don't know. I don't know if you'd say staying exciting, like exciting marriages don't fail or anything. But it's just like we're always going through it. And two years ago, we then had our first child. "Now, let's figure this out together. Now we're gonna have our second child, let's figure this out together." I don't know but...

0:35:09.7 NA: It's interesting. It's almost a theme of continual problem solving together.

0:35:13.5 KM: Yeah, right? Well, they say continuous growth is important. And maybe we're growing, but what you're saying is that problem solving, 'cause we're growing a little, but I wouldn't say every one of those points taught us some big lesson. It's just more like, "Oh, we just made it through that together. Good. Let's go to the next thing now."

0:35:35.0 NA: Yeah, it's really interesting when you were saying about you got a job and she got a job, and they weren't in the same city. And so instead of trying to decide, "Okay, whose career comes first?" You both took the jobs and moved in with your respective families and made the decision to sacrifice the proximity of your relationship to be long distance, which those aren't easy decisions to make. I'm always curious how people navigate that thing of whose career comes first. Is that something that comes up for you two outside of that one instance?

0:36:04.1 KM: Yeah, it comes up all the time. And at that time, it was a, "Hey, we're going to see who likes their job more, or who likes their job less." It was probably more on the who likes their job less, 'cause we didn't wanna make the decision, "I like mine more, so you have to come to me." It would just be, "Hey, I'm seven out of 10 happy, you're eight out of 10 happy, logically, it makes sense that I give mine up for the better of the group." And we've had to make that same decision when we decided to move to South Carolina, 'cause we both, luckily, were bored in our roles and my company could relocate us. Different role, same company, and it was like, "Hey, do you wanna move somewhere?" A few cities were on the list, and this is the one that we said, "Yeah, let's do it." And so we made that decision together and, boom, here we go. Yeah.

0:37:09.9 KM: Yeah, those decisions are... They're not easy. And when we'd make them, we're having the conversation about both of our careers. "What does this mean for her?" As a nurse, it

was easier to get a job anywhere we go. But now that she's in management, the question is, "If we relocate again, do you have to go back to floor nursing? And if so, is that something you wanna do? Because if it's not, and you have to, then we don't move for the betterment of your career and what you wanna do."

0:37:45.0 NA: Yeah, and they aren't necessarily easy answers, it sounds like it's just an ongoing conversation, and what is worth it to sacrifice at one point might not be worth it at another point.

0:37:53.8 KM: Oh totally, yeah. And I think that now we have children, right? So the question now is, "Okay, if I have to go to floor nursing..." Now, I may have to be working on a Saturday and a Sunday, where before that wasn't an issue, because then you get Monday and a Tuesday off, but now it's not spending time with the family while we're at the pool on the weekend. So a lot more variables come up as you just go through the journey.

0:38:27.3 NA: Tell me about the point in your marriage when you decided to have kids. Is that something that you always knew that you wanted? Sidebar, this is all very fascinating to me, one of the... I could have said this at the top of the episode. One of the things that I love a lot about our friendship is we have made... If you were to make a list of the big adulting choices about marriage or kids, or a more traditional career path, you and I have made different decisions on almost every one of those, and so I'm very nosy and fascinated about all of your choices.

0:38:57.5 KM: Yeah, I know. Yeah, this is an interesting one. We weren't the type of couple that talked about, "Oh, when we get married, it's gonna be blank" before we were engaged, and we didn't really do that with kids much. We did talk about like, "Hey, do you wanna have kids and at what point?" Because obviously you wanna be on the same wavelength before you end up getting married [chuckle] But one of our goals is, "Hey, we have to just own a house, own a home," it didn't have to be a house before we do that, we have to have some sort of stability for any child we bring into the world. So, that was the early conversation. I didn't think about it much after that, but as soon as we had our home under our feet and we purchased it, she was like, "Okay, so when are we gonna have kids?" [laughter] I was like, "Oh, well, hold on one second." And I think we ended up having Winston a year and a half later, but, yeah, it was something that she held me to... Hold me to sounds like I didn't wanna, but, yeah, I... That's when we did it, and that's how the conversations came about and the same thing for the second one, have we stabilized our lives, are we able to add another child into this? Yes, yes. Okay, let's go.

0:40:25.4 NA: What were your fears about having kids before Winston was born?

0:40:28.6 KM: Oh, gosh, I didn't... So cliché, right? But I wanted to be able to provide more for him than I had, and I don't mean so much financially, right? 'Cause we talked about that before, but I always had this fear of instability, like, I mean, my mom will never listen to this, so she won't be embarrassed, but there were times when we didn't even have a registration on our car, and I knew that in the state of California, that if you don't have insurance and registration, then your car will just get towed if you get pulled over or they could just pull you over for expired tax and take your car. So, like when I would be getting taken to track practice, I'm worried about getting our car taken

away and not being able to get to school the next day. So, that's the majority of my worries when it comes to Winston and what he has, and what I can provide to him. My mom was a bit... I had a very loving family. It wasn't an abusive, nothing bad like that that I just hoped to be better than for him, but, yeah, just to give him... To take that worry of losing everything off of his mind that I had a lot from middle school on when I kinda understood it to be a problem, yeah.

0:41:51.4 KM: I guess, can I glance it like, my dad was not a dad to me either, I didn't miss it, because I left him when I was three, so I didn't know him, but later in life, I did have a few bouts of crying about the lack of that in my life. So I obviously just... I try to be the best, like loving, fun, thoughtful daddy that I can be to him, whether that's, "You wanna go kick the soccer ball around, or do you wanna paint." Type of stuff, or whatever it is. I just want him to have a feeling of comfort in me that I always watched my friends with dads around and just be like, "Oh man, his dad could just pick him up from school." [chuckle] I wish I had that. So I just hope to be that for him.

0:42:43.7 NA: Specifically for you, what would you say are some of the best aspects of having a kid as well as the hardest parts, to pro con list on kids, let's go?

0:42:52.8 KM: No, it's good. I'll start with the hardest, because you will never be prepared for it in any aspect, you are more tired, you're just drained, you worry more than you would ever think you would worry about a child. Yeah, so just from the get-go, from two and a half years ago to now, I still don't have the same energy that I had a week before having him, because you're just... You're just on edge all the time in a good way and you're like, "How can I make sure he's okay?" But, whether it's having to wake up at 6:45, 'cause that's just the time that his clock turns him on or it's, you know, oh, he has soccer today at school, I hope he likes it, because last time he cried and was worried and didn't like it. So you just... 40% of your energy is now pointed at this person, and you still have to do 100% of the other stuff you have to do in life. That's the hardest. Everything else is just so cool about it, does he look like me? Does he look like Dominique? He's rambunctious and crazy just like me, I love that. That's hilarious. He...

0:44:15.3 KM: When he's starting to put together sentences, you just look at him like he's an alien, 'cause you're like, I didn't teach you that, you just watched us talk like that, and then you've repeated it, in context, which is just amazing. I think seeing their growth and that's growth physically, that's crazy and exciting, intellectually, or just the way that you see that he loves us, which is kind of weird 'cause you don't teach him, "Hey, you love your mommy because she picks you up and gives you a kiss and then puts you down to bed," and that repeated action is something that you will then eventually appreciate, it's just... He has this weird... He'll just say, I love you, Daddy to me. I don't know if he's just saying it randomly or if he's feeling it, but it's just the little stuff that you get out of them like that, that just makes it so exciting and you just wanna see it again and feel it again the next day.

0:45:18.0 NA: I like hearing you talk about this. It's like really sweet. Your voice takes on a different quality. Yeah, as an outside observer, this is something that I very much like hearing you talk about.

0:45:28.2 KM: Appreciate it.

0:45:29.2 NA: I'm interested in the identity change for you. I've talked to some of my friends about the process of becoming a mom and all the things they love about it, but then the sort of grieving process of grieving who you were as more of a single person, or who you were before. What was the transition like, or I guess still like, you're a couple of years into it, of becoming a dad for you, was there any kind of grief of former life or identity, what has the identity change been like?

0:46:03.9 KM: It hasn't been bad. I don't think... You know me, and I've explained enough, I hope to the listeners that I'm the wild one in the bunch, I am the least stable one maybe. And so I think when people see me as a dad, they're like, "Oh, exciting, fun. He's gonna calm down," and this child is just gonna have a lot of fun with him. And so I get a lot of that from people, and so I'm met with a lot of excitement with it, and we all know people who are having kids and you're like, "Look guys, this person probably shouldn't have a child, but good luck for them." And I feel like maybe people say that behind my back, but what I'm met with verbally is just like a pure excitement for everyone, so that it's like, "Oh, I've come back and I've... I've won the championship," so people just wanna talk to me about it, 'cause people just always wanna talk to me about Winston and hear about Winston. So, it's been an added exciting part of my life that other people like, so yeah, it is draining and tiring, and now I am a father who has to do stuff for someone else all the time, but I'm just riding this wave of excitement from my family and my co-workers and friends that I'm just gonna keep riding.

0:47:28.3 NA: Yeah, I didn't know that that's what you were gonna say. Obviously, it's interesting in me, when you say that, I feel almost a little bit jealous. That's not the path for me. Like having kids, doing those things, I'm very clear that that's not the path, but there is something to be said for how socially rewarding it is to make what other people think are the right and successful choices, which... I don't mean to put words in your mouth, that's not exactly what you said, but that thing where other people are excited and where they can understand. I feel really loved and supported by friends and family, and yet I feel like a lot of the people in my life, there's sort of some kind of barrier between us where they look at my life choices and they're like, okay, but they don't really get it, or they very much wouldn't make those same choices for themselves, and so it provides sometimes a little bit of a barrier to that level of excitement that you're talking about.

0:48:22.2 KM: Yeah, that's interesting.

0:48:25.5 NA: Here, analyze this. Let's go.

0:48:27.9 KM: At the same time. There's no doubt that I look at some of the stuff you do in your life as more successful than mine, like how cool is it that you get to drive across the country and live in a van, and if you want just... What is it, what is the game where you hit with the paddles, ding ding ding ding...

0:48:55.5 NA: Whack-a-mole.

0:48:56.7 KM: Sure, you just get the bounce around the country if you want. I'm trying to figure out how on earth that I can just go on a three-day vacation with our friend Jonathan in October, and it's like the craziest event that I'm gonna do in the past three years, that would be no issue for you, you get to go on these awesome month plus long hikes. And just be out there with yourself and people you meet and experience nature in the world in a way that I never will be able to, and I will never be filled in that same way that you are fulfilled, so yeah, it's easy or it's easier to look at it like, People who are becoming parents, but I'm not. But you have people who are looking at the stuff that you do that may have been, oh, it was just something I did three years ago, is something that I look at and say, "God, I wish that someday I could just do that," but there's no way given my life choices that I'll ever be able to do that, so.

0:49:57.7 NA: Yeah.

0:49:58.2 KM: I just have to look back at your Instagram post about it and live with it.

0:50:01.8 NA: Sure, sure, I know it is interesting the way that we... And I don't mean this in a bad way, but the way we just compare ourselves to each other, I feel like that's a very human thing to do to just... And that we can't have all the things. So at any point along the way, we're saying, okay, this thing or this experience or this life path or job or whatever is worth more to me than sort of the doors that I'm closing in order to have it, and that's what all of these decisions are, essentially. I think it's interesting that you said before that you feel like the least stable one in the bunch, so to speak, because when I think about you and your choices, they all seem to me to be based heavily around the prioritization of stability.

0:50:43.7 KM: Yeah, you're right. And that the choices that I ultimately make do, right? My career path is, work for a very large company that is very stable and will be less likely to go under than family business, that may pay more. But I think in my mind, I'm just all over the place, and I don't know what I'm doing and I'm figuring out along the way. So that's maybe where my definition of myself as unstable comes. But yeah, you're right, I do take the... Not the easy route, but the more stable, slower-paced route that I know will be there, so that I cannot be in the same financial point that my mother was in while raising me. Yeah. That's interesting.

0:51:35.7 NA: And then it makes sense. It is interesting too how the decisions that we make in response to our upbringing, right, because obviously, you and I had different upbringings, but there, from what we both shared with each other even just in this conversation, there was an element of financial insecurity in both of our upbringings at a similar age, and that that seems to, and I know I'm over-simplifying this, but that seems to have put you on a path of, Wow, I wanna do whatever I can to be in a more stable place where I own the home and I have the corporate career and these types of things. And for me, it was almost the complete opposite of, How do I need as little as possible or never be in the position where I could lose everything the way that my parents did, because I don't have a lot to lose. And there's definitely some not great stuff about that element for me that I'm still unpacking, but I think it's interesting who we become in response to our upbringing.

0:52:30.8 KM: Yeah, very true. Yeah, that's... And I think we've both done the right thing for ourselves, right?

0:52:36.7 NA: Totally.

0:52:37.7 KM: And yeah, I could have... I could easily see myself saying, Let me make it simple, so that... Let me make my life as simple as possible, so that the risks that I want to take, if they don't pan out, then, hey, I'm only falling back on zero debt rather than a whole house that I have under me. Yeah.

0:52:57.0 NA: Yeah. What do you feel like right now, at this time in your life, is your definition of success for yourself?

0:53:05.4 KM: Oh, geez. It's such... It's a moving target. It really is. I used to say to a... I used to think that, Hey, when I own a house, family or not, when I own a home, then that means that I've reached where I need to be. I did that. Obviously, the cheese has moved. I used to talk to a co-worker about, "Hey, if we just reach this amount of money on a... From a salary standpoint, what else do you need?"

0:53:35.2 NA: How much was it?

0:53:36.7 KM: It was \$100,000. I said, "If we ever reached that amount of money, that's all we'll ever need to make." Because what else do you need? Our mortgages are this, we're not going on extravagant this or that, we both had spouses who actually have an income, so why else would you need anything more? And as you approach that in your actual career, you're like, "Wait. One, I never thought I would be at this point, but now, what is the next step? How do I get beyond that?" And it's not that I watch MTV Cribs and want some mansion, but it's just a matter of you see someone else at your own company who is as... Who you may be as smart as or smarter at a higher level than you, and you're like, "Well, why can't I just do what she's doing and just make X amount more, so that I can maybe just add it to the coffers?" But it's just this odd, There's something in front of me and ahead of me that will always be not unreachable, 'cause I don't sleep at night hoping to make more money, dreaming about more money and how I can achieve it, but sometimes it just seems achievable, and you're like, "Well, why don't I just give some more effort to get that?"

0:55:04.2 NA: Do you think... If the target keeps moving, and this isn't just you, this is all of us to some degree, this is capitalism to some degree, and to every degree, that what is the enough point?

0:55:17.7 KM: I don't know. I hope that that... I don't have an answer to that. I hope it is when my children are... When I can look at what I need to provide for them, that the pace that I'm on will get them there, whether that's... Whether I say, "Hey, I just want to be able to have \$50,000 for both of my children when they graduate from college or high school, just to help them, whether it's a school or they wanna use it for a house, whatever." Maybe in four years, I can look at how much I'm making and the savings plans we have set up for both of them, and that's something that's gonna easily be achieved, and I say, Alright, well, how do I throttle down the engines and just coast in my

current role, or just bounce around with, sounds bad, but less ambition career-wise and just find something...

0:56:18.0 NA: That doesn't sound bad to me at all.

0:56:19.3 KM: Yeah. Probably yeah. It sounds bad in my career field, right? That's how I'm sort of conditioned. To just be happy, not continue to try to grow, grow, grow, so I become someone who's working on Saturday and Sundays, 'cause that's not fun and that's not what I want for myself or my family.

0:56:38.9 NA: Yeah. I am making a mental note in four years to follow up with you about this, because I think... I don't know, I just have some curiosity around if we... If the target constantly moves, what stops the target from continuing to move unless we make some kind of real effort or real internal shift or change to decide, Okay, this is what enough is. Because if it used to be, okay, owning the house, that's gonna be the thing, and then it's the \$100,000 salary, that's gonna be the thing, or it... And then you get there, and then there's no shortage of dangling carrots that can go in front of us. And so I'm interested, do you have an idea of what it would take for you, let's put this hypothetical four year... Four years from now, you're on the savings path, all the things that you just said have come true, wave the magic wand to manifest that, what would it take for you to be like, "Okay, yeah, I am gonna downshift?"

0:57:32.0 KM: Gosh. I think I've been thinking about this already, because as... We're in South Carolina, and this is not where we want to live forever, and we are looking to move, whether that be back to California or back to the West somewhere, and thinking, When we find the place we want to be, and we have figured out a way to make that financially unstressful for us, I think that's when I'm able to do that. 'Cause now the cost of living here is so low that we're just banking savings for the anticipated move back West, which will cost more. So once that happens, once the stress of needing to save goes away and we now see our 30-year mortgage, that mortgage is X amount and that's doable, and we now know, I'll just say... Let's just say \$3,000, whatever, we now know all we need is \$3,000 for this house every month plus X, Y, Z for our general living expenses, then you can say, Oh, well, if we're making \$9,000 a month, what are we killing ourselves to do that? Let's pull back and so we can enjoy more, so we can go to soccer games, so we can go to piano recitals, so we can just hang out in the back yard at 4:30 in the afternoon, rather than looking at my phone and seeing if my boss needs something.

0:59:04.5 NA: Yeah. I just wonder, and there's no way that you can answer this now, so I guess we shall see in the future, I'm interested how hard that actually is to turn off, because if that's been the conditioning of an entire adult life and career, and that's what's rewarded in the workplace, to get to the point where, I'm just not gonna check my phone to see if I heard from my boss. I wonder if that's... I know that it's possible, but I think there's something in that that's, we'll see, it's interesting.

0:59:30.1 KM: Yeah.

0:59:31.5 NA: Yeah.

0:59:31.9 KM: I'll let you know if I find it.

0:59:33.2 NA: What is it that makes you wanna leave South Carolina?

0:59:36.6 KM: It's the South. It's the American South. There are Confederate flags everywhere. It is... I'm from... We are from California. I went to college in Portland. So I'm used to a very diverse place, and this is not. It's Black, literally Black people and White people here, and it is very divided in a lot of ways. And it's just something that has, since the day we moved here, is like... It just takes a toll on you. And you see it, not... Obviously, seeing a Confederate flag on a car is like, "Oh my gosh. Where are we?" But even the local news. Yes, people of all colors and sizes commit crime, but I just noticed that when it's a Black kid, they show the photo, but when it's not, they just will just mention that a car got broken into and the person was apprehended.

1:00:35.2 KM: So it's just cultural backwards-ness of where we are. And lovely place, our neighbors are nice. We live in a newer neighborhood that has younger people, a lot of transplants. So that always makes it easier that your little bubble is safe. But you go outside of that bubble and you don't know what you're gonna find, unfortunately. And I'm just tired of seeing it. And not to say that it's not in California where we were, where we grew up, or it's not in Portland when I went to college, but it just... There was enough of the side that makes me comfortable and happy to drown out the others. And I don't want my son to be in a place where... And we live 10 miles away from plantations.

1:01:27.0 NA: Yeah.

1:01:27.9 KM: This is really weird to... My great-great-grandparents were slaves, so... From two hours away from here. So it's just really weird for me to just drive by a place, and this is, "Oh, Middleton plantation." It's like, "No, this shouldn't be celebrated." [chuckle]

1:01:48.7 NA: Yeah.

1:01:49.8 KM: It's just hard. It's very hard for me.

1:01:49.8 NA: Yeah. And like you said, it's not that going to California is the magic land where none of that exists. But if within your own power, you can pull the levers to put yourself and your kids in an environment that isn't like that and that doesn't have that, why not do that?

1:02:06.5 KM: Yeah, exactly.

1:02:07.8 NA: Yeah.

1:02:08.1 KM: Exactly, so...

1:02:09.4 NA: I wanna go back. You mentioned before having gone to college on a football

scholarship. When we met, I mostly knew you as my best friend's new boyfriend. That was my first association. And then kind of as the fun-loving jock, like Kenneth, the football player, I, in a recent conversation we had, realized that you first ran track, that it was track more than it was football. And I'm curious, do you have... What are your first memories of being like, Oh, I'm a good athlete?

1:02:39.7 KM: Gosh.

1:02:40.0 NA: Was there a point where it was either a coach or a thing, someone said that to you and you're like, This could be something?

1:02:47.5 KM: Yeah. Well, there was a point in seventh grade-ish, I did hurdles too, not just sprints, so I'm a sprinter, if you're trying to visualize me.

1:02:58.4 NA: Just visualize. To put this voice on someone running really fast. [chuckle]

1:03:01.7 KM: Yeah. Put this voice on... Yeah. Thick athlete. Across short distances only. Yeah. So in the hurdles, I did well, and I was fast-ish. But when it came to a sprint, not so much. And then eighth grade, I was just really blowing the competition away in the hurdles. I was winning some more sprints, and then long jump I was doing really well too. So not just the straight ahead fast stuff, but some stuff that took a little more skill, and... What is it? We went through the sort of regular track league championships of me just killing people. And one of the coaches from one of the Valley teams, which is the majority Black athletes, and my team was the majority White athletes, and then myself, the Black person, said something to my mom, like, "Hey, we could take this kid and try to go to the Junior Olympics." And my mom said... Asked me if I wanted to, and I'm like, "Sure, yeah. The guy seems nice, and I've seen the people that are on that track team. So yeah, let's keep doing it." So I went and trained with them a summer, and it was the same summer that I started playing football for the first time.

1:04:20.6 KM: And I was slowly becoming a starter on the football team, as I was doing that extra training in track. And I just started winning these meets with bigger, faster people. And that's when I started getting... [chuckle] probably started getting a little too cocky with myself too, because of that success that started to come out at that point. But that's when it really started to hit when I was winning against people in track that I had never beat, and then in football, me being this dude who just started playing a month ago being the starter on the team was kind of... It was kinda great. [chuckle]

1:05:00.2 NA: What's it like to have something like sports athletics be such a defining and reliable, consistent part of your life for years and years and years, and then to graduate college and have it just stop, not that... I mean, I know that you're active now, but to stop in that sort of structured, maybe glorified way that you were just talking about? What was that like for you to kinda leave that behind?

1:05:26.2 KM: I was very happy to. Yeah.

1:05:28.9 NA: Interesting. Okay. I wouldn't have thought you would have said that. Okay. Yeah. Tell me more.

1:05:32.0 KM: Because of just... I don't know why, but I hated using my body to get myself through whatever. I just was tired. I didn't get... So at the end of my athletic career was mainly football, 'cause that's what got me into college. So I'm not the typical jock who wants to be in the NFL. And that is what everyone on every college football team is. No offense to the other one person who isn't, is listening, but... And I just...

1:06:04.9 NA: I don't know that anyone who thought that they were maybe gonna be in the NFL is listening to us. Not to paint with a broad brush, but you are definitely outside of my regular audience listenership.

1:06:16.0 KM: Oh, good. But I hated the type of people. I had a few friends who were more like me, and we can... We got along. But the majority was just me just fighting against the expectation that I'd be only into football, want to hit people as hard as I can, and all I cared about was winning. Yes, I care about not wasting my time, so winning a game was better than losing a game. But at the end of the day, I could sprain an ankle and it could all be over. So I didn't put all my eggs in that basket ever, and I think that that... People could see that and feel that, and I didn't fit in. So when I finished football, I was... I didn't watch college football. I didn't watch NFL football for a few years, 'cause it was just so irritating to me because I was just seeing the people that I hated from college. Not actually, but I was just imagining like, "Oh, this person was probably at a college and was mean to the normal kid on the team too." So I just really distanced myself from it. Yeah. So it wasn't... It wasn't hard for me. [chuckle]

1:07:28.1 NA: That's interesting. This sort of picture that we've been painting on the stories that you've been telling, it seems like a lot of the choices that you've made have been towards having more stability, like being able to provide this kind of life for yourself and for your family, and these things along the way. And it makes a lot of sense when you just said, "Hey, you could be really good at this," and then you sprain your ankle and it's all over. There's something that's really unstable in that.

1:07:55.5 KM: Mm-hmm. Yeah, true.

1:07:58.2 NA: That makes sense to me that that's something that you would be like... It's like the stakes are too high almost, and the lack of sort of being more well-rounded that it sounds like you were craving.

1:08:08.1 KM: Yeah. And I never truly thought I would be an NFL football player, but people did tell me that I could. And I actually talked to an NFL team about where they may call me after the draft. And nothing about that was exciting to me, 'cause I'm like, "Look, maybe I'll make it on to your team. Maybe I have to fly out to the East coast and go to your mini camp and you may give me tens of thousands of dollars, which is way more than I have ever had in my life, and maybe I make \$150,000 for a year or two. But that stops when some other young guy who's taller and faster than

me comes in. Completely out of my power. And now I have not had the internships that I needed, not had the job experience that I needed. And now I'm trying to be... Get into the real world with no idea what it's like." So that right there is why I was like, "No, I'm not really gonna do this." I did the... What is that called? The combine stuff. Did the 40 meter... Or 40... Is it yards? That's how long have been an athlete. [chuckle]

1:09:15.9 NA: You're asking me. I don't know about any sort of football situation.

1:09:21.3 KM: Yeah. I did all the 40 yard dash, the pro day the bench pressing, the... All that junk, and I was just like, "Alright, cool. Are we done?" And I just left to then go to my Human Resources internship. [chuckle] Yeah, I was never... I never wanted that for myself. My brother is probably still disappointed in me, but too bad.

1:09:43.0 NA: So you think that it was something that people around you wanted for you, but not something that you wanted for you.

1:09:48.2 KM: Oh, totally. Yeah, yeah.

1:09:50.1 NA: And that's brave to be able to say, "Actually, no."

1:09:56.5 KM: Yeah, thank you. I never thought of it that way, but yeah. I just... I had my other priorities, and that priority being stability.

1:10:05.3 NA: Yeah.

1:10:06.3 KM: And I went... And went after that.

1:10:08.5 NA: Do you feel that you have achieved that goal of having a stable life?

1:10:14.6 KM: No, I don't think so, because I always think, and this probably had to do with me being laid off that one time, 'cause it was literally them saying, "Hey, this whole department, we're just gonna outsource it." So I always think that that could happen to me at any time. So whether I'm doing something that nobody's ever done before at the company, or I've done something that was so difficult, no one can imagine how I did it by myself, I am still like, "Yeah, but that doesn't save me, because tomorrow they can decide that they're just not in need of this organization."

1:10:49.6 NA: Yeah.

1:10:50.1 KM: Yeah. So fear is always there for me.

1:10:54.6 NA: How do you combat that? Because I mean, and obviously, I don't live inside your head, so what I'm saying and what I'm gonna say next, is quite a projection, but I don't see you as someone who lays awake at night, gripped with anxiety of, "Oh my God." Maybe you do, maybe this is your secret thing that happens, but it seems like you're able to handle this well.

1:11:14.7 KM: Yeah, I do have anxiety a lot, and I keep... I talk to my wife about it, and I talk to Jonathan about it a lot, from time to time. But yeah, there is that in me. I will have panic attacks about certain things that I can't control. I... From starting in high school, I started having these anxiety attacks, where I'd have a small dream about just... It's not really mundane, "Can you put this circle through the square hole?" And it's just like, "I can't do it, I just... There's no way I can do this. I know you want me to, but I just can't." And it would be crippling and I would wake up and I would just have to stay awake and try to keep myself awake, because if I fell back asleep, I'd go right into this dream. And I think it's from just that, "How do I get to this goal in my life?" or, "How do I keep this job?" And the panic of failure, that that could cause if I don't. But yeah, I still have struggles and still think about that a lot. But as you say, I do a good job of covering it up and being happy otherwise, but it's something that's always in the back of my head.

1:12:27.3 NA: Well, and I don't know that covering it up is necessary, right?

1:12:32.3 KM: Yeah.

1:12:33.0 NA: You're allowed to be anxious and be who are.

1:12:36.8 KM: Yeah.

1:12:36.9 NA: I'm certainly not asking for you to pretend. I very much appreciate your honesty around this type of stuff, especially because, I don't know, it's not very sexy to not have answers to things, and yet all of us to some degree, are struggling with these same questions. What kind of life do I want to provide for myself and my loved ones? What is my career path? What is enough money? What is it gonna take for me to be able to take the big exhale and feel like I'm okay? These are real questions.

1:13:07.2 KM: Yeah. Right, yeah. And everyone wants to be the guest on your podcast and just have, "Oh, boy I thought about it this way and this is why I did it it and this is why I'm gonna be perfect in the future." But nobody has everything lined up and ready for them to just knock down. I had a conversation with... I reached out to a random person from high school, 'cause they posted a story about being vulnerable and talking about your failures, so people can learn from it or something. And I'm like, "Yes." If we could just talk about this stuff more, we would all understand how we're all afraid of the same stuff, and we're all going through these struggles. And whether that be, "Hey, all I want is to get braces, and I just think everybody hates me because of my bad teeth or perceived bad teeth." And if you just say that out loud, you might get 20 people who say, "I love your teeth, they are perfect." But since you never say that it's something that you need help with or struggle with, no one will ever think to just randomly tell you, "I don't know, that's perfect, I love it, you're beautiful that way." So yeah, we all struggle, obviously, at younger points of our lives and it continues today, about, "Oh, my receding hairline. How bad is that?" I talk about it more, and you realize people don't care, 'cause they have in 35 and that's just what happens to dudes when they turn 35.

1:14:38.9 NA: I had a significant amount of hair loss, it's mostly stopped, which I'm grateful for, but I think in reaction to stress and getting divorce and all the life change and stuff that happened, it was like an acute stress response. And I felt so anxious about it and so... I didn't... It made me realize how... That I'm more vain than I thought that I was, and being able to talk about it with other people who have been through similar things, was really helpful. And once I started talking about it more publicly, I did get messages from people of like, "Oh my God, my hair is falling out too." And I know that's just one small example, but I agree with you, that there's a lot of power in just being honest about what it is that you're going through, even if and especially if you don't have the three-step magic answer plan for solving it.

1:15:20.6 KM: No, yeah.

1:15:21.4 NA: I think that's... Oh, go ahead.

1:15:22.5 KM: No, I was just saying that's why I love the aspect of social media, where someone who is struggling through something, can just throw it out there and society can normalize it for them, so that they don't feel so alone. I'm not an over-sharer on social media, it's just pictures of my son, maybe my wife, maybe me once in a blue moon, but when I see people with that like, "Oh, here's my struggle that I've gone through," and I see someone underneath that, just commenting, "You got this, I went to this too." I bet that one person saying, "I'm with you on this," helped so much for that person. So, yeah, I guess, I think that we're getting better at it, but I do enjoy seeing people share their struggles, so that they can... So people can help them with it.

1:16:12.1 NA: Yeah, that's the three line of my entire business, so I'm glad. I think that's a good place for us to start to wrap up. If you could leave folks with one call to action, based on our conversation, what would it be? Maybe a question to ask themselves, or a small action to take?

1:16:31.2 KM: Yeah. You don't have to have the perfect plan, you just need to have your plan. And whatever that is, you can always change that plan. Yeah, 'cause I have spent a lot of my time in life, worrying about setting myself up for future success and then realizing along the way, that, "Hey, I'm successful now." So just know that you may not achieve that one goal that you set for yourself, but I'm sure you achieved a lot of great stuff along the way.

1:17:03.2 NA: I love that. It's funny, most of the people that I have on the show, use social media differently than you do. But do you wanna share a social media link or something, if folks wanna say hi?

1:17:14.2 KM: Sure if you want to. KRMackins on Instagram. I have a Twitter, but I don't use it, so no point in that. But yeah, I'm public, so you can see it, you can tell me how horrible my mumbly voice is, or you can say hey, or just check out what my son looks like.

1:17:36.3 NA: You can go look at pictures of your cute kid. Yes, I will put that link in the show notes. Kenneth, this was so much fun. Thank you.

1:17:42.9 KM: Thank you. I appreciate it. I'm so excited we did this. I was very nervous but I've been waiting for this since the day I knew about your podcast.

[music]

1:17:54.0 NA: And that's our show for today. Thank you so much for listening to this labor of love. Our music and sound editing is by Adam Day, who it has been a total dream and pleasure to collaborate with for the past six years. And thank you especially, to the people in our Patreon community, who have made all 200 plus episodes of Real Talk Radio possible. You can find that community of ours at patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. It's a wonderful group of folks who crave honesty, intimacy and possibility, and for whom I love creating essays, live gatherings, exclusive audio content and more, each and every month. If you'd like to join us, I will see you over there, patreon.com/nicoleantoinette.

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