

DIKE: I don't feel honestly that I struggle to communicate very much. As much as I talk and I think I talk too much, I do like to listen more, and I do think I do listen more.

Part of the reason I don't struggle to communicate is because I try to listen and understand what it is that other people are saying and then try to convey my thoughts or my ideas or my emotions in a way that I will craft so that they can understand my message.

ADAM: It was the summer of... well, one of my painfully formative years as a child, and I was in a week-long summer camp for Jewish kids. We spent all our time learning about and experiencing the outdoors firsthand. For me, however, all it turned out to be was the first time I experienced a disconnect between my brain and my mouth, where I thought specific words but different words came out. I still don't like camping.

On the final night, around a large bonfire, trivia games were held. Teams were grouped by who we bunked with and each bunk had a specific color. That night, we all sat in our bunker groups on what I remember to be an outdoor amphitheater-like setting with giant logs as our benches.

Our team wasn't too far behind on the scoreboard. Just a point or two behind first place. One right question and we could take the lead. Then it was my turn.

I walked to the bottom near the fire pit where the emcee was and was handed a wooden board with my team's color on it. I don't remember being nervous but at that age, I'm not sure I understood what nervous was.

"Contestants, here's your question. What do you call an animal that eats meat?"

I threw my hand holding the board up in the air because I knew this one. In my head I was screaming carnivore.

Then the flashlight hit my face and a microphone was placed in front of my mouth... and I froze. I knew the answer but was unable to say it. I started sweating and really wishing he'd get that stupid light out of my eyes.

Finally, I meekly said, "Herbivore?" as if I was asking a question, too.

I heard my bunker-mates on the log groan and immediately felt my face flush with shame and embarrassment in the dark. I knew the right answer and still the wrong word came out of my mouth.

We came in 3rd place that night. And ever since that summer, I've preferred written communication so I can say the words I mean to say. Too many carnivores out there. They're the ones that eat meat.

My name is Adam Greenfield, and you're listening to The People in My Neighborhood.

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DIKE: My name is Dike Anyiwo and I live in the Midway District in the city of San Diego.

ADAM: The Midway District is sandwiched between Sea World and the San Diego International Airport, and is right where interstate highways 8 and the 5 intersect. It's also close enough to the ocean that if you looked up, you might see a seagull taking a quick breather from the bustling beach life.

But Dike isn't originally from San Diego, even though he and I both share the desire to make living here a permanent thing.

DIKE: I'm from Murrieta, but I do live in San Diego and to the best of my ability, I'd like to stay here for the rest of my life. I wouldn't mind traveling internationally and things like that. But as far as where I'd like to call home, I love San Diego.

ADAM: Murrieta is a city of just over 100,000 people between San Diego and Los Angeles but slightly more inland than on the coast. It's also on the edge of the Cleveland National Forest so Dike had plenty of opportunity as a kid to be outdoors, which he took advantage of.

DIKE: So there's hiking trails that I would go through there, and as I got older and started getting into sort of more competitive soccer, I was like, Oh, like I need to train. Like I'm at a higher elevation now and if I run up into the hills that are further away, I could build my stamina. So I spent a lot of time running those trails and sometimes walking those trails. I think that was sort of a big part of where I sort of gathered that appreciation for silence and for stillness because there are not very many people out there, and it was kind of my thing as to get away from my family and get away from all these things and just be in my own head and go.

ADAM: Sometimes his outdoor activities weren't completely spent alone, though.

DIKE: I had a dog as a kid growing up, so we'd run around and throw sticks and I'd kick a soccer ball around and at some point he learned how to like play soccer with me. I used to do, but yeah.

My dog's name is Nike. Greatest dog of all time.

ADAM: Dike's love of nature also included my personal nemesis, birds. My distrust and hesitation of these prehistoric leftovers is, admittedly, unreasonable at best but really hurting no one, at worst. For Dike and many other bird enthusiasts, that evolutionary aspect is what interests them. Not the irrational Hitchcockian fears of things flying at their faces.

DIKE: I remember growing up and really enjoying books about birds, creatures. I remember being fascinated by evolution at one point and how dinosaurs back in the day are basically now sort of most noticeable in birds, as far as DNA strands and things like that.

ADAM: I may not have known about his passion for birds as a child but one thing I've known about Dike is something he eluded to a minute or so ago, his love of soccer.

DIKE: I very much remember being out in the fields and running around and chasing my dad with the ballpark. The earliest memory I have is probably three or four, just in the backyard, running around and he was playing Keep-Away with us. My dad's from Nigeria. So soccer is obviously a big thing over there as well. It's always just been a big part of my life.

ADAM: Of course, anyone with siblings knows it's never that easy.

DIKE: Even though I've been playing since I was a kid, a lot of what I also remember growing up as a child is, I have two sisters. I remember losing every argument. I've been frustrated as a person for a very long time.

ADAM: In case you can't hear it, there's a smile in what he just said. I know it because I saw it on his face. There may be some seriousness to the statement but it was all in fun.

Still it gets back to that space to unravel and unwind. For Dike, that hasn't really changed as he's gotten older and wiser.

DIKE: It's interesting and you talk about sort of the shifts between youth and adulthood and adolescence and maturity, if you want to call it where I'm not that, but occasionally, sometimes I do thrive off of the the energy of other people. I do love being sort of involved in and just in the swing of things, but oftentimes, yeah. I call it hermit mode. When it's just like, you know what, I just got to fall back. Whether it's just staying in for the weekend or honestly even still going up to my parents' house, like that's unfortunate that it's an hour and a half drive. So oftentimes what I do is, if I'm looking for that, I just go get it.

ADAM: So let's talk about the times he spends in the community after he's decompressed. If you asked him what is full time day job is...

DIKE: In my full-time day job I'm an account executive at an advertising and PR firm.

ADAM: But if you asked him what his profession is, you'll get a different but also the same reply.

DIKE: I like to think of myself as a storyteller more than anything else. I consider myself a storyteller.

ADAM: Not the stuff you find on the New York Times Bestseller list but in San Diego, they hold a ton of weight in the local community.

DIKE: I tell stories, historically obviously about soccer, as far as my previous iteration. Today I tell stories about transportation. I tell the stories about the real estate development industry. I tell stories about San Diego really at large. The community that we have here, sort of the challenges that we have. I like to tell stories about the environment, and this sort of nexus between housing and transportation and our climate. I think I've been very fortunate to evolve into this position now where I do get paid to talk.

ADAM: Most of that paid storytelling is through the ad work he does during the day. However, Dike also has his own way of telling stories.

DIKE: I started a little digital outlet a couple of year and a half ago now called the San Diego Chronicle where I still write and I podcast and broadcast out that way. Occasionally I'll write for someone else's site, but for the most part it's through my day job and then just through my day to day conversations with people face to face.

ADAM: And Dike's learned a pretty insightful lesson over time.

DIKE: What you see, particularly in today's age with social media and things like that, oftentimes people are saying things, but they're not necessarily communicating. You can talk to someone, but that's not the same thing as talking or speaking with someone. So you just got to recognize that and adapt and evolve, and if you want to be successful, you find ways to get creative.

ADAM: Outside of the storytelling work he does through the ad agency and through San Diego Chronicle, another way Dike is staying creative is through photography.

DIKE: Lately in the last, I'd say only the years I actually picked up a camera and started shooting. Previously in my previous work, I'd been in a digital marketing space, so I spent a lot of time in front of a camera, modeling products and making those kinds of advertisements as my mother would say. But being able to shoot myself has been fun. Spending more time behind the camera and whether it's looking for lighting or looking for subjects or whatever it is that I happened to find. What I've also really enjoyed is just being present, like I said, where activities and actions are happening and capturing those moments. Going to city council meetings or going to some of the club meetings around town or some of the... Sometimes they're sort of more social events, but sometimes they're more serious.

ADAM: When it comes to Dike and his storytelling about all things San Diego, you can tell he really loves where he lives. And it's as if giving back as much as he can is equally important as what he gets from living here.

DIKE: Yeah, I mean to a certain extent, like San Diego is my home now. My community is just sort of evolved and my mom is from Zimbabwe and something that she's always said to me was that charity begins at home. I don't know that I make enough money to truly be charitable in the sort of traditional sense. But one thing that I've always been able to do is to give my time right to people and to courses. That's something I've always done. So being sort of now on the Midway Community Planning Board now where the literal neighborhood where I live is on the cusp of some change. We've rezoned a lot of the area and there's going to be a whole bunch of new housing and different kinds of projects that are going to come.

So being able to sort of give back to my little community, it's something that I appreciate it. I think it rings true that it's funny and here we are at home, at my house in the community where I live in and I'm doing as much as I can to be active right and to do that.

ADAM: Giving back to his community is more than just a thing Dike wants to do, though. There's a drive there that's fueled by his own admitted feelings of guilt and obligation.

DIKE: So both my parents, like I said to you earlier, are immigrants from different countries. My dad was born and raised in a village in Nigeria. My mother is from Zimbabwe, and so they both at a relatively young age, sort of mid '20s, late '20s left their homes. Left their families, came to another country for education and basically wound up living their lives here. The situation and the circumstances that myself and my two sisters were born into is fundamentally different from a lot of the situations that my close families. My mom was one of 11 kids. My dad is one of eight and I have quite a few first and second cousins who are still what we call back home. Still in Zimbabwe, still in Nigeria who are my age. Some are older, some are younger, but people who are on a different path in life simply because of where they were born and sort of the opportunities that are set for them.

So when I say that word, guilt and obligation, I do always feel a certain level of responsibility to maximize my potential and to maximize my output and my contribution to the world, and to my family. The guilt is sometimes strong because I don't know that I'm doing that. There's no way to really know that. But it's like, am I doing enough and there's no real answer. So like you can never really get to the bottom of it. So that's something that I think sticks with me. Then obviously, sometimes you just know you can do better. Everyone always wants to do their best. But like sometimes for whatever reason, whether you're playing a sport or at work or just hanging out with your friends, you could be more present. You could be... There's always room for improvement. That's the other side of it too.

ADAM: I'm not gonna argue that point. I don't think anyone can ever reach a level where they can improve no more. But just for fun, let's pretend someone can. In fact, I asked Dike what he would do if he could do anything he wanted without having to spend the time learning new skills or being hampered by the rules or laws that govern our current existence.

DIKE: Sort of tongue in cheek but something that I do feel very strongly about is if I could have gone back in time to whatever that meeting was where mayor Kevin Faulkner got up and left because the Soccer City people and the SDSU people were beefing and it wasn't happening. I would go back in time and rewrite that history. That's a big thing. Like I said, tongue in cheek because I'm sure people will have their opinions about that comment.

I think honestly, probably the most relevant thing if there was one thing that I could legitimately do to somehow find a way to like get people up to speed with the fact that like our planet is dying, like that matters quite a bit to me to be fair. Whether it's a climate change, global warming, sort of popular... Like however you want to describe it. If there was a way to make people en masse understand the gravity of the situation that we're in and do it at a time where it's not sort of too late. We're watching Planet Earth or Blue Planet or whatever it was last night with my roommates and we're just like, jaws on the ground because like our world is so cool and it's dying. That bothers me.

ADAM: Thanks for listening to The People In My Neighborhood, a podcast series about being a good neighbor by getting to know my neighbors. The music in this episode is by Blue Dot Sessions.

Thanks to Dike for sitting down to chat, then showing me his sweet little garden out on his 2nd floor apartment deck.

DIKE: My pleasure. Thank you for the invitation to come on this. This is a really cool thing.

ADAM: So until next time, I bought a new bike recently so if you ever want to go for a ride, let me know. I was thinking it would be nice to explore the neighborhood that way, too....