

JODY: I think I'm just driven by what most people would probably say is the love and all of the people that you're with, your family. The love the people that surround you, your friends, your community. That there's always a glimmer of hope that you're going to do something good for the world. I feel like we're all born and we can contribute. Or, we can not contribute. There are certainly people that don't. I'm definitely of the mind that I want to contribute something.

ADAM: It was a Monday, the first week of March, 1992, and I was sixteen going on completely lost. It was unseasonably warm that morning as I got into a rusty Volkswagen bug owned by a friend of my friend Rico. They were picking me up in my high school's parking lot. No, I didn't have a note from my mother. Besides, I'm pretty sure she wouldn't approve of my next traveling destination; I was going on tour with the Grateful Dead. First stop? Hampton Coliseum, Hampton, VA.

We camped for a few days beforehand. I met people from all walks and locations in life. We traded things for food or clothing. I even had one person spray paint an image on the back of my jacket. I wonder what happened to that jacket.

On the day of the first show, March 5th, we arrived at the venue only to find out they were checking the tickets of the occupants of the cars to make sure they should be in venue parking lot. You know, where half of the reason to go to Grateful Dead shows is.

Rico nor myself nor the others we were with had tickets. Time to improvise.

We slowly walked the perimeter of the fence until we found a spot where the ground sank lower than the bottom of the fence creating a hole for someone to crawl through. So we did.

The moment we got underneath and in and stood up to brush ourselves off, we heard security guards calling for us and running our way. We hightailed it straight for the crowd of Deadheads.

Then, something magical happened. The part of the crowd we were running towards sorta opened up, creating this alleyway of space, which the four of us ran into. The crowd closed up again and by the time security reached the outer perimeter of the crowd, we were all attending our first Grateful Dead show.

Ever since that early Spring day, there has always been a special place in my heart and mind about the kindness of strangers when both the strangers and the kindness are covered in patchouli.

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

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JODY: my name is Jody Hayden, and I live in the SoFo neighborhood of Traverse City, Michigan.

ADAM: It seems every town in this country has a nickname for certain areas. One of my favorites, though, is Dumbo, the neighborhood in Brooklyn. It's an acronym for Down Under the Manhattan Bridge Overpass. But where Jody is? It's more tracks than bridges.

JODY: SoFo is the word for South of 14th Street. We're considered still in the city, so still in Downtown, but we're kind of across the tracks. It's not the posh side of Downtown. It's more of the families and the working class of the city.

ADAM: And for Jody and her husband, DC, and their two cute kids, this is their kind of neighborhood.

JODY: Definitely. Yeah. In Northern Michigan, although it's a beautiful place to live and have a family, there's not a lot of ethnic diversity here. The one way to get some diversity is just to live among the working class. Yeah, sometimes we live in a bubble here, and so it's nice to at least have economic diversity in our lives.

ADAM: So here's the windy road of my history with Jody, which is a bit limited. We didn't grow up together or meet in school or even work together. In fact, we've only hung out in person a few times, if that.

I met Jody through a mutual friend, Angie, though Jody and Angie have been friends much longer than I've known Angie. I had heard Angie talk about her out of town friend, Jody, a lot. However, even though we became good friends while I lived in Iowa, I hadn't really known Angie more than a few years before I moved away in 2008. So by the time I met Jody, I was just settling in to San Diego 1500 miles to the southwest and was visiting Iowa at the time.

Sadly, Jody and I were relegated to following each other's lives via Facebook. So not really the best way to get to know somebody.

But here's what I took away from that first night Jody and I met at Angie's house.

First, Jody might very well be the kindest person I've met. Now, she's also a mom and has some of the south in her background so I'm sure there's some fire there. But her kindness and respect for others is one of the first things I'm sure you'll also learn about in this episode.

The other thing is, well, kinda silly but the New York Yankees fan in me never forgot it. Jody's related to former Boston Red Sox catcher Jason Varitek.

JODY: He is actually a cousin of a cousin kind of thing. He is not in my immediate family. I hate to break this news to you. But he is my grandmother's sister's husband's family. If you can follow

that. My grandmother's, my mom's mom's sister's husband's family. But I have never actually spoken with Jason Varitek or been to one of his games.

ADAM: Ok, you're forgiven.

So now that that's out of the way, let's find out just who Jody is.

JODY: I guess in an overarching way I think we're all made up of our bags of life experiences, and so many of those do happen when we're children. I had this bucolic growing up on the Mississippi River in a small tiny town in Camanche, Iowa. I think when I was really little, I was just really happy to be playing outside mostly with boys because I had an older brother and he had all this friends around. We would go frog gigging, which is really cruel to frogs. I don't recommend it, but that's what we would do for fun. We would try to flood out ground squirrel homes, poor buckets of water in one end and hope they would run out the other end. It was a pretty Mark-Twain-y kind of life. It was really sweet.

ADAM: But as quaint and cozy and somewhat terrifying for frogs and ground squirrels as that sounds, Jody's had a bit of the travel bug for a long time.

JODY: I remember in third grade having to write a report, and I wrote a report on the Galapagos Islands. I thought how exciting it would be to go there. Then the funny irony of this is now that I've been to Ecuador probably 12 times and Ecuador owns the Galapagos Islands, I still have never been to the Galapagos Islands. That's mostly because when I go to Ecuador I'm going to visit cacao farmers and I'm working. I haven't taken a lot of time to travel outside of that. Yeah. It's still on my bucket list, and I know that I'll get there.

I think when I was young, yeah, I really, even when I was in third grade, wanted to see the world.

ADAM: So where did that itch come from? School assemblies.

JODY: Well, we had a guy that used to come to our school. I don't know if he traveled around the Midwest, but I think he did. But he would travel to some, what I thought when I was young, was some exotic place in the world. Then he would come back and show all of these things from his travels. A lot of times he would go to Indigenous groups in different parts of the world because he would always come back with headdresses and indigenous clothing. I remember thinking he was the coolest person ever. I just wanted to talk to him and get to know him. I think little things like that just instilled this interest to travel and to study other cultures and just be interested in human behavior in general.

ADAM: Since her 20s, Jody has had a professional hand in both the chocolate and coffee industries. But food is another thing from her childhood. She told me of her great grandmother, Big Mama, that had full size candy bars available 24/7 and Kool-Aid as thick as syrup.

JODY: We loved her, of course.

ADAM: But her extensive work with coffee and chocolate doesn't stem from her generous great grandmother, whom I happen to be very jealous of. The insatiable need to know where things comes from is part of that involvement.

JODY: I ended up working in food in coffee and chocolate, which is interesting because you can't grow those things here. But, yeah, just that curiosity about what we consume and where it comes from has been something, I think, I've always wanted to learn more about. Even in school when I was youngster, I always wanted to figure out where things came from? Was there a factory somewhere in China that made that? I remember writing a report, Where Did my Couch Come From? It was literally breaking down every piece of a couch and where it would come from. Yeah, I would guess I was kind of a strange kid that way.

ADAM: I read dictionaries. We all had our thing. So where did Jody's thing with chocolate and coffee start?

JODY: I started in specialty coffee in 2001 and 2002. I started my adult career there. I was coming directly out of graduate school. I went to the School for International Training in Brattleboro, Vermont. I studied organizational management focused on social change.

Part of that program is a requirement that you have to do a year in the field. I ended up living in Chiapas, Mexico. This is a state that's on the southern border of Mexico. It borders Guatemala. It's on the border of Oaxaca and the Yucatán and Mexico. It's a modern Mayan state I would say. There are people that are living in the highlands in these areas that don't speak Spanish. They're still speaking so it's either Tzeltal or Tojolabal, which is one of many Mayan indigenous languages spoken in that region.

I ended up living there and I got to know coffee farmers who were looking for a fair market. At the time, these coffee farmers had created a pacifist civil group. I don't know. Some people would call them rebels, but they were known as the Zapatistas. I think a lot of people know who the Zapatistas were. They were rising up against the Mexican government because they were demanding their rights. We saw, when I was living there, several occasions of their rights being violated by the Mexican government.

We could witness this battle and why it was happening. We were inspired to buy their coffee and sell it in the United States.

ADAM: So Jody and others got to work on a business plan.

JODY: Yeah, that was an enlightening year. We just got really lucky that all of these things that we needed to fall into place fell into place. But writing a business plan and trying to figure out

how to import green beans when they cost \$100,000 for a container. Where does that money come from when you don't have any money? You have nothing really but school debt at this point. That's where I was.

ADAM: Fortunately, Jody's strong influential women in her life stepped up to help.

JODY: Yeah, my grandmother gave me a loan off of a life insurance policy for \$3,700. That was what was used to build Higher Grounds Trading Company, which became one of the few Fair Trade Coffee Roasters in the country at the time and was wildly successful. It was a lot of work. I was a 24-year-old at that time. I was building a coffee business with a small loan and working two other jobs to funnel money into the coffee business. It really took off. I remember like in August of 2002 we sold our first bag of coffee, and by the end of that year, we had made \$40,000 in sales. That's considerable growth in just a matter of months.

ADAM: Eventually Jody moved on from the coffee business and years later, found herself presented with an opportunity.

JODY: we bought our business seven years ago from a woman who feels like family to us. She feels like a grandmother. Her name is Mimi Wheeler. She was originally from Denmark, so she's a Danish lady. When we bought the business from her, she already had several staff. It was our job to keep everybody employed and keep, like I was saying, advancing the business or transforming it in a positive way.

ADAM: Knowing the strengths of others around you and the staff you employ is a sign of a really good business owner.

JODY: I have a master chocolatier certification from a school. Yeah, so in that way, yes, I would say that I'm chocolatier. Although Sarah, a woman that works for us who is a trained chocolatier, and even DC, my husband, they do most of the chocolate-making in our shop. Yeah, and way more skillful than I am. I don't want to detract from their talents by calling myself a chocolatier because I can do it if I have to and I love to practice and I love to taste chocolate and I do it all the time. I certainly help with the recipe development. But the day-to-day is done by two people that are way more talented than I am.

For me, I kind of like to find the people that are better in certain jobs than I am and then get out of their way. Find people that are better at you at the skills you're not necessarily great at and, yeah, trust them and give them the tools they need to succeed.

ADAM: Jody also knows that business relationships, both local and abroad, are equally important as surrounding yourself with a good staff of employees. And you remember that travel bug we talked about earlier? With the current chocolate business, Grocer's Daughter, Jody gets to both travel and build strong relationships on a face to face level.

JODY: I kind of think I was probably born in the wrong hemisphere. I was probably supposed to be in the Southern Hemisphere in Latin America. Because, I just, every time I travel there, I feel so connected to the people and the culture. But I think the reason I love to travel is just that I really appreciate my relationships both up here that I have developed through the business and, of course, in Ecuador. Now, we could be sourcing chocolate from all over the world. There is good chocolate to be had literally from all over the world. But it's because we have these relationships in Ecuador that let us dive deeper into the world of cacao growing in chocolate that we continue to go there, and we always will. It really does come back to these long-term relationships.

Yeah, and so I think, to me, when a business becomes just about managing transactions like managing emails and invoices in and out and paying the bills ... even though I do all of that right now behind the scenes ... if that's all it is, it's not as fulfilling in my mind to me.

ADAM: So from frog gigging, whatever that is and please, don't tell me, to running a successful chocolate business to having a wonderful family, whether that's her husband, DC, and their two kids or the grandmother that always had something good to eat, Jody seems to have had a pretty swell go of things.

But is there something she wishes she could do without any reason to prevent her from doing it?

JODY: I can't just do one. I have a few. I'm going to start with my favorite one because this is what I would really want to do is go to the bottom of the ocean. I would really like to do it as a scuba diver. I know a submersible could probably go, and then you're encapsulated in a little submarine type thing. But I'd rather just swim down there. Yeah. I think I would like to scuba dive to Mariana Trench, which is the deepest part of the Pacific Ocean. It's the deepest part of all the ocean, but it's in the Pacific Ocean, and just check out what the heck's down there.

I imagine it's dark and there's some really cool lighted ... I mean you've seen photos of these fish, right, that have little antennae coming forward off the top of their head and they're lit up. I think there's going to be really cool creatures like that. I feel like there's just going to be a ginormous jellyfish that's even bigger than anything we've ever seen. Yeah, and I guess I need protection that I wouldn't get hurt by anything.

I would love to speak seven languages and play four instruments just with a blink of an eye. If I could go back to my young self and say, "Do this and don't give up on it," it would be learn an instrument and learn another language. I would have the gift of those overnight with the blink of an eye if I had another thing that I could do without limit.

Then the third one would be I would mind control Donald Trump and just resign from Presidency. I would take over his brain and just announce to the world that I'm resigning as

President and I'm sorry that I'm a buffoon and have made such an embarrassment of our country. Then I would politely go to my nearest gulf club and spend the rest of my days there.

ADAM: Thanks for listening to The People In My Neighborhood, a podcast about the lives we didn't know our friends and neighbors had.

A very grateful thank you to Jody for sitting down with me on three different occasions to get the best audio possible.

JODY: Oh, my God, I am so happy to do it. Thank you. Thank you. Yeah, I'm sorry I'm a little bit of a talker, but it's fun. Your questions are fun. It's fun to get to know you a little bit better during all of this. I'm happy. Yeah, I'm really happy to have done it, so thank you.

ADAM: So until next time, we should definitely have a neighborhood barbecue. We can set up out back by the grill....