

The Lovelight Stories[®]

PODCAST

Ep: 22 | FROM ROCKET BLAST INJURY TO MISS VETERAN AMERICA WITH MOLLY MAE POTTER
| TRANSCRIPT

Please know this transcript has not been edited for quality in grammar, etc. We wish to be socially-inclusive and provide another means of accessing our podcast to those who have difficulty hearing, so please enjoy if that's you! ☺

00:01.58

Stephanie Jacobs

Molly May, thank you so much for joining me on the Love Light Stories podcast today.

00:07.59

Molly Mae Potter

I'm really excited to be here. It's been a year in the making, so I'm glad we were able to make this happen.

00:11.74

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes, and it's so perfect to have you on in the fall and be able to share around in November Veterans Day and everything. And you have the most impressive bio, which I didn't realize when I first met you how many things you have been ah involved in. But I'm going to encourage our listeners to actually go and read that in the show notes.

00:33.68

Stephanie Jacobs

um so that you can kind of get a glimpse of that themselves. But you've also, along your own life journey, have had some pretty significant challenges that you've overcome. um And so I just want to start there. And as we go through the the culmination of your story, bring us back to just this the place where it started, the background of your work and experiences that ultimately led you to be called to Afghanistan in 2010.

01:01.96

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah, well, i thanks for allowing me to come on to the show and to share my story. um And again, like to me, I don't feel like it's anything significant.

01:12.98

Molly Mae Potter

It's just life and the opportunities that presented themselves and the journey that we've gone on. um

01:18.54
Stephanie Jacobs
and

01:19.89
Molly Mae Potter
So I'm from Pilot Mountain, North Carolina, which is quite literally the town of Mayberry. So the Andy Griffin Show and everything, I am Molly May from Mayberry. Like you can't make this up, right?

01:30.17
Molly Mae Potter
Like wholesome apple pie Americana Molly May Potter. ah

01:34.53
Stephanie Jacobs
That is awesome I love I love that picture

01:37.48
Molly Mae Potter
Isn't that funny? I'm a third generation veteran, so my grandfather served in World War II in the Navy, and both of my parents are actually veterans. They met in the Army as Army nurses, both my mom and my dad.

01:51.56
Molly Mae Potter
And so growing up in small town, North Carolina, I really actually didn't think about military as a career. um And I really didn't think much of my parents being veterans or even my grandfather having served in World War Two. It was just never a part of our family's life and and narrative.

02:06.36
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

02:06.57
Molly Mae Potter
Um, interestingly enough, um, and, uh, I had wonderful supportive parents that when I said I was going to go do something, my parents were like, yeah, like let's make this happen.

02:18.78
Molly Mae Potter
And so when I was four years old and I said, I want to be an astronaut, my parents were like, yeah, you can do that.

02:24.55
Stephanie Jacobs
ah Yeah.

02:25.07
Molly Mae Potter

and This is what you go do. You become a science geek, you know, you're really, you you go to a good college, you work out, and, like, they just put me through the best schools they possibly could.

02:38.10

Molly Mae Potter

My dad um is a chemistry brain, and so I, I credit a lot of my, my science geekery to my dad and really nourishing that from the get-go.

02:47.44

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. i know

02:52.35

Molly Mae Potter

And so um for college, I went to Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University. I studied space physics and aerospace engineering and math. And I was like in all the space clubs. And I was like, I'm going to be an astronaut.

03:02.84

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

03:05.76

Molly Mae Potter

I interned at NASA in astrobiology. So I joke that I used to you know our work for the the group trying to find little green men on Mars. And it was a blast.

03:14.77

Stephanie Jacobs

ah

03:15.74

Molly Mae Potter

I loved it. um And then, um, that was, you know, kind of going back a little bit, um, in high school was when 9-11 happened. And I remember, like, really being impacted by that.

03:27.47

Molly Mae Potter

And I thought, you know, I have a call. Like, I feel like a calling to serve. Like, it was, it was a, I hadn't really thought about the military beforehand.

03:34.79

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh,

03:35.43

Molly Mae Potter

And so going into Emperor Riddle Aeronautical University, I actually went there starting off an Army r ROTC.

03:41.54
Stephanie Jacobs
oh wow.

03:42.29
Molly Mae Potter
Um, and, uh, but okay Well, both my parents were in the Army, I'll do Army ROTC. And then I got into college and I was doing all my studying and I was like, the Army ROTC lifestyle and aerospace engineering physics lifestyle, like don't mix.

03:57.62
Molly Mae Potter
But I still had this pool to serve. And so even though I had all these internships at NASA,

04:01.19
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

04:05.20
Molly Mae Potter
I decided that post-graduation I was going to go serve in the United States Air Force.

04:13.16
Stephanie Jacobs
and Wow.

04:13.24
Molly Mae Potter
And um I went to Officer Training School, um which is like 13-week boot camp for officers. I was what they call a 13-week wonder. oh Yeah, so I spent three months at at at Maxwell Air Force Base in Alabama.

04:27.70
Molly Mae Potter
And um this was at a time where they really weren't putting through ah um people that were non prior enlisted it was really kind of a path for primarily prior enlisted that we're going to now go into the officer course and they were primarily pushing through pilots and here I was a non prior enlisted.

04:44.07
Stephanie Jacobs
nine Yeah.

04:46.73
Molly Mae Potter
um a candidate, if you will, officer candidate, ah who was also an engineer. So I stored up a sore thumb. like I was not made for officer training school.

04:54.89
Stephanie Jacobs
hey

04:56.99

Molly Mae Potter

It was very clear that the the Air Force was bringing me in for my ability to do math problems, right?

05:03.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh, wow.

05:03.94

Molly Mae Potter

It was clear from the get-go.

05:04.08

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. and and

05:08.29

Molly Mae Potter

And so I joined the Air Force as a test engineer, and I was doing all the geekery with test engineering, and I was really good at it.

05:15.12

Stephanie Jacobs

no

05:17.60

Molly Mae Potter

like I got like as a lieutenant, like officer of the year as an engineer for the base, which like doesn't ever happen.

05:22.02

Stephanie Jacobs

That's amazing.

05:25.56

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

05:25.65

Molly Mae Potter

Um, and, uh, I was getting by masters and metallurgical engineering. I mean, really like going full force, like this is what I have to go do to be an astronaut. I have to go to test pilot school.

05:37.08

Molly Mae Potter

I have to get my masters in engineering. I yeah like checking all the boxes for the astronaut program.

05:39.12

Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

05:42.31
Stephanie Jacobs
Yep. This is what I mean by an extensive bio. So, right?

05:47.30
Molly Mae Potter
It is crazy. like Come along with me for the ride and this will make sense in a little bit and why I'm telling you all this background.

05:50.19
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

05:53.74
Molly Mae Potter
So in 2010, there was this this program where they were asking for Air Force engineers to volunteer for deployment with special operations command to go help bring quick-turn technology to the field.

06:08.91
Molly Mae Potter
And I was like, Oh my God, totally me. So I had gone like to to test pilot school short course.

06:10.92
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

06:13.93
Molly Mae Potter
um I had also um I was the only ah Air Force engineer at that time they had sent to joint targeting school. Like I had done all the geekery things. So I thought, Oh, let's go do this deployment.

06:22.48
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

06:23.98
Molly Mae Potter
So I was so excited. um And so I deployed to Afghanistan in 2010 as an engineer, but with um joint special operations command.

06:34.28
Molly Mae Potter
So like you're you're talking about like the top of the top, like the SEAL teams, the Delta forces, totally out of my element. Like Molly Potter, the engineer who was going to be an astronaut, was now suddenly out of my comfort zone.

06:44.51

Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

06:48.53
Molly Mae Potter
And I got there thinking, oh, I'm going to do like engineering in Afghanistan.

06:48.93
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

06:53.77
Molly Mae Potter
I ended up i without saying what I did because I can at this point, but like it was not engineering. That was a very small piece of it.

07:02.99
Stephanie Jacobs
no

07:03.34
Molly Mae Potter
um and Long story short, um ah The base came under attack in September 2010 while I was there.

07:14.56
Molly Mae Potter
And by the way, I had been like outside the wire. I had been doing some crazy stuff like the night before. And we worked at night.

07:21.68
Stephanie Jacobs
Wow. Yeah.

07:22.98
Molly Mae Potter
um And so the the sun rose. I had just gotten back onto base. um People really weren't out and about yet. They weren't doing their morning runs and going to breakfast yet.

07:33.82
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

07:34.41
Molly Mae Potter
um And the sun rose, and I was at this base called Bagram Air Force Base, which is like in a valley. And the runway is down below.

07:40.68
Stephanie Jacobs
who

07:43.65

Molly Mae Potter

And I'd gone back from the DFAC, which is where it's like, ah think of it as an on-base cafeteria when you're deployed.

07:50.43

Stephanie Jacobs

Okay. Yeah.

07:51.08

Molly Mae Potter

I got in a sandwich and like ah just punched in the face with hot air.

07:58.88

Stephanie Jacobs

ah

07:59.07

Molly Mae Potter

um And the last thing I remember was just waking up and a friend of mine um kind of picking me up and dusting me off and being like, are you okay?

08:11.26

Molly Mae Potter

Are you okay? And I'm like, and all I hear is this ringing in my ears.

08:15.97

Stephanie Jacobs

a um oh oh

08:16.50

Molly Mae Potter

I'm like, what happened? And still feeling like I'd gotten punched in the face. And realizing that the base had come under attack so little did I know it was also the end of Ramadan and it was the sunrise after Ramadan and so like activity was picking up again. During Ramadan there's not as much activity at that time.

08:34.13

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

08:35.60

Molly Mae Potter

um And I had gotten like kind of blown across like a gravel road. Think of it that way.

08:40.71

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

08:41.49

Molly Mae Potter

And I didn't have my personal protective equipment on because I was on base.

08:41.57

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

08:45.02

Molly Mae Potter

I was getting a sandwich. like This is the the most non-sexy military like war story ever.

08:46.28

Stephanie Jacobs

Right, right.

08:50.58

Molly Mae Potter

I was getting a sandwich with Doritos.

08:50.88

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

08:52.97

Molly Mae Potter

I'm going to take a shower and going to go to bed because I'd been up for like 40 hours outside the wire.

08:53.69

Stephanie Jacobs

and

08:58.88

Molly Mae Potter

um

08:59.01

Stephanie Jacobs

And when, let me just clarify for people when you say outside the wire, is that like, yeah, that's what I.

09:00.43

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah, the wire. outside a protective fence. So like doing convoys, flying over but mountains and helicopters.

09:07.25

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

09:09.06

Molly Mae Potter

So you have a, and the Bagram Air Force Base is like a big base. Like at that time it was, it was like a mini city.

09:15.61

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

09:16.30

Molly Mae Potter

You had like international pockets all over the place, right? um And it was huge and it was very well protected.

09:20.28

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

09:22.97

Molly Mae Potter

And very, very rarely did it um experience an attack like this, right? Like I just happened to be,

09:29.17

Stephanie Jacobs

Hmm.

09:31.52

Molly Mae Potter

the wrong person at the wrong place at the wrong time. And actually, I would say it was the right time because it had been an hour later, that defect would have been so full of people. And it just happened to be me. And there was what they call a T barrier, which is like a big concrete barrier.

09:50.83

Molly Mae Potter

that that we put around certain places to kind of help if there had been an attack in one place for these very reasons.

09:52.07

Stephanie Jacobs

Yep.

09:55.51

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. Oh my gosh.

09:57.09

Molly Mae Potter

um And it had landed just on the other side of the T-barrier. So none of the shrapnel or anything landed in me. I got the blast wrapped around the T-barrier, and I had just come around that T-barrier.

10:10.38

Molly Mae Potter

And I got the blast. And so it just think of it as like just squeezing my lungs like inwards and then punching me across the road is really what happened.

10:20.39

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh, my gosh. Yeah, like like kind of like I'm picturing it as you say it kind of like in a movie when they're kind of like shut like.

10:27.35

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

10:28.76

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

10:29.01

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

10:29.50

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

10:29.69

Molly Mae Potter

And what's also really interesting about this is that, um and I was talking with a friend recently, I'm just going to call him Chris, my friend Chris, who also had an accident in Afghanistan years previously.

10:37.54

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Mm hmm.

10:43.35

Molly Mae Potter

um And he remembered different pieces kind of differently as it goes on, right? And so this is my memory of how I remember this story happening.

10:54.91

Molly Mae Potter

But It's changed a little bit over the years. And it's only changed in that there's things that like I suddenly recall.

11:04.03

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

11:04.23

Molly Mae Potter

And then there's things that maybe I forget. And I will say like the the memory of what it felt like to have like a like feeling like it was punched with hot air, that memory didn't come back to me until I was actually in Israel.

11:17.16

Molly Mae Potter

And I was talking to another IDF soldier who had also experienced a blast injury. And he was like, yeah, I felt like I got punched in the face with the fists of like hot air. and i was like

11:26.07

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

11:26.63

Molly Mae Potter

Like it's like that came back and then, um, you know, like how I landed and where I landed.

11:28.23

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm.

11:32.52

Molly Mae Potter

And it's like, I've talked to some other people and they're like, yeah, you were on the ditch over here. No, you were like this. You were like you know, so I, I don't really know it.

11:38.04

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

11:40.52

Molly Mae Potter

It's one of those where there's like, there's some key things that I know kind of happened. And then I would say the following 30 minutes or a little bit of a blur, like they just are, I remember the taste of just gravel in my mouth and thinking I need water because I've got gravel in my mouth.

11:47.45

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Yeah.

11:52.86

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

11:54.59

Molly Mae Potter

and being kind of groggy. And I remember my friends, um, picking me up and putting me in the shower with all my clothes, just like trying to, like trying to figure out if I'm bleeding or whatever.

11:57.30

Stephanie Jacobs

Yep.

12:04.87

Molly Mae Potter

And then they they said, all right, go put her to bed. Which when you have a concussion, if you have last, that's like the last thing that you do.

12:10.97

Stephanie Jacobs

You don't do that.

12:13.18

Molly Mae Potter

But in 2010, the protocol was go put her to bed and then we'll go check on her.

12:13.35

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

12:19.68

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh wow, that's surprising.

12:20.96

Molly Mae Potter

Right. And there were there are only a few other women that I was with, right? um In my little compound area, everything else was men.

12:26.66

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

12:27.75

Molly Mae Potter

And so there was another ah intelligence officer that was with me. And um she was the one that kind of came and checked in. And I remember I just slept like really, really hard.

12:39.27

Molly Mae Potter

And it was really groggy. So I never get headaches.

12:42.12

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm.

12:42.24

Molly Mae Potter

And I like had a bad headache. I had the ring in my ears. But like my whole chest just felt like it was bruised and punched. at that time.

12:50.54

Stephanie Jacobs
Wow.

12:51.72
Molly Mae Potter
12 hours later, after all that happened, I was back on a helicopter with 80 pounds of gear on me flying over Kabul.

12:59.72
Stephanie Jacobs
You're what? You're kidding.

13:01.72
Molly Mae Potter
Yeah, no, I'm not kidding.

13:02.45
Stephanie Jacobs
Oh, my goodness. And and it's not just because it was deemed that you were OK and it seemed you were OK or or do you know why?

13:04.36
Molly Mae Potter
Yeah.

13:10.16
Molly Mae Potter
like I think a couple of things, right?

13:11.88
Stephanie Jacobs
Okay.

13:12.04
Molly Mae Potter
Like in looking back on this time, again, I don't know what 20 something year old Molly was really thinking, other than remembering

13:18.15
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

13:20.50
Molly Mae Potter
I have been selected for this mission. I have a mission to complete. I am a woman in this role. I was the second woman ever chosen to be in this type of role, by the way.

13:31.96
Molly Mae Potter
um I'm fine. I'll get over it. I'm not a damsel in distress. I could do this, right?

13:38.92
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

13:39.48
Molly Mae Potter
And I guess I was just so focused on I have to go do this.

13:39.52
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

13:44.64
Molly Mae Potter
I have to go do this mission.

13:46.11
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm hmm.

13:46.67
Molly Mae Potter
And I have to appear and be okay that I kind of convinced myself that I was okay.

13:52.31
Stephanie Jacobs
Interesting.

13:52.52
Molly Mae Potter
Um, but the rest of the time it's like my chest just felt like it was just punched and bruised. Um, I had so many like nasal breathing kind of problems.

14:03.36
Molly Mae Potter
Like I just felt sick, right?

14:04.82
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah, yeah.

14:05.50
Molly Mae Potter
Um, and, um, I was just so tired, like just lethargic tired for the rest of it.

14:09.47
Stephanie Jacobs
Hmm.

14:14.80
Molly Mae Potter

But my deployment was pretty like short from that point on. Like it was like, okay, make it a few more weeks, make it a few more weeks, make it a few more weeks.

14:18.03

Stephanie Jacobs
ye

14:22.02

Molly Mae Potter

I made it a few more weeks. But here's where the story starts to get kind of interesting as far as like the like what happened afterwards.

14:25.76

Stephanie Jacobs
Mm hmm.

14:30.45

Molly Mae Potter

I would say the blast injury wasn't as significant as the isolation thereafter. So I went home.

14:37.42

Stephanie Jacobs
Mm

14:38.11

Molly Mae Potter

I was, again, on the special deployments, right? It was a one-off.

14:41.54

Stephanie Jacobs
hmm.

14:42.63

Molly Mae Potter

I went back to regular big Air Force with no one around me that knew the experiences that I went through, that I could talk about. Everything was like super classified.

14:53.06

Molly Mae Potter

I couldn't tell anyone what I was actually doing in Afghanistan, including my parents. My parents really and thought what I thought I was going to be doing, which was like project managing engineering in Afghanistan.

15:00.49

Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah, right, right. Yeah.

15:03.47

Molly Mae Potter

No, I got there. It was a totally different thing. Totally different than what I was sold on.

15:07.56
Stephanie Jacobs
Yes.

15:08.81
Molly Mae Potter
And

15:09.00
Stephanie Jacobs
And were you discharged early or were was this just the mission was done for you?

15:14.14
Molly Mae Potter
Mission was done for me, went back to Big Air Force.

15:15.17
Stephanie Jacobs
Okay. Got it.

15:16.76
Molly Mae Potter
um um And I went back to Big Air Force and it was, um I really struggled back in Big Air Force. So I had a few months before I was having to to move to my next duty station.

15:27.92
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm-hmm.

15:29.20
Molly Mae Potter
And I was just, I suddenly became irritable, like super irritable, um anxious all the time. um And feeling like I was, I had this like longing for being back in Afghanistan i and kind of processing through that years later.

15:40.72
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

15:43.11
Molly Mae Potter
It's more about, well, they were the ones that understood what I was going through. Like it was more wanting to be back there because I felt like one, maybe I had a mission to do.

15:46.49
Stephanie Jacobs
Right.

15:50.24
Molly Mae Potter

And now I didn't have as much of a sense of belonging and two, they understood. Like they understood what I had just gone through and now no one around me does.

15:55.36

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

15:58.96

Molly Mae Potter

um And the the like the lethargic kind of feeling I had after deployment for a few weeks then turned into actually insomnia, I think with the anxiety. And I've never been a big runner.

16:17.51

Molly Mae Potter

Like before then I was like, yeah, you know, I'll work out to pass my PT test. Well, I was like, well, it's two o'clock in the morning. I'll go run some of this anxiety off. Well, that running became um obsessive and I really was kind of running from my problems.

16:32.88

Molly Mae Potter

I was running 10 miles at two and three o'clock in the morning and having all this anxiety and then feeling like I can't control my emotions and my thoughts.

16:33.13

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh, interesting. Yeah.

16:41.72

Molly Mae Potter

I started to try to control other things like my food intake.

16:45.19

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

16:46.26

Molly Mae Potter

So a few months after my returning home from deployment and starting some of these behaviors, um my marriage also started to fall apart.

16:54.49

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

16:57.75

Molly Mae Potter

I was married to another um Air Force person at the time, and um that fell apart rapidly. And we got stationed together, we moved and got stationed together to to Las Vegas.

17:11.79

Molly Mae Potter

And when we moved to Las Vegas, we moved into separate apartments. And um when I was alone in my apartment, I could now enable my controlling behaviors.

17:22.72

Molly Mae Potter

i could I was alone with my thoughts. I could do all of these really unhealthy, crazy controlling um actions on my own body.

17:35.37

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

17:35.50

Molly Mae Potter

um And no one else could see me or point it out, right? I could live my own world and then control this facade to the outside.

17:38.58

Stephanie Jacobs

Right, right.

17:41.72

Stephanie Jacobs

And did you realize at the time you were doing that and why you were doing that or was it more so it's just kind of this compulsion because you were trying to deal with.

17:49.45

Molly Mae Potter

It was a compulsion and I was like, I'm going to get over it. I'm going to be fine.

17:53.27

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

17:53.76

Molly Mae Potter

I'm going to get over it. It's just a phase. No one needs to know about this.

17:56.03

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

17:57.61

Molly Mae Potter

No one needs to know. Ended up getting divorced um and at work, you know, I'd gone from being like the star officer and winning like officer of the year for the base.

18:08.20

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

18:08.90

Molly Mae Potter

to suddenly having issues focusing and performing at work. It wasn't that I was misbehaving or anything like that. It's just my brain didn't have the energy or the attention or function to actually perform the job at hand.

18:15.36

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

18:21.89

Molly Mae Potter

And it was incredibly demanding because i you know I'd been the star officer, so I kept getting more and more demanding positions.

18:26.16

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

18:27.94

Molly Mae Potter

I eventually got this position in Las Vegas, which was, you know, great to set me on the path to astronaut if I continued along that direction. And it was like the the top of the top. And this is what you go do and really demanding and crazy hours. And um my my mental capacity was just not there because my energy was so far gone on all the emotional trauma response that I was trying to suppress and the anxiety.

18:56.00

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

18:57.18

Molly Mae Potter

And then I stopped eating and nourishing my body. And I was getting so, so thin um to the point where because i I was a flyer that my G suit didn't fit and they had to shove rags in my G suit to actually get the equipment to fit.

19:11.44

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh, wow.

19:14.58

Molly Mae Potter

And in 2013, after having this eating disorder, kind of pushing my friends and family away, being divorced and not addressing any of my mental conditions, um I was in a car wreck in 2013 in Las Vegas, and that was a breaking point.

19:33.76

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh wow.

19:34.87

Molly Mae Potter

um I won't get into the details of the car wreck. I was physically okay, but mentally that broke me.

19:38.30

Stephanie Jacobs

Mmhmm.

19:41.53

Molly Mae Potter

And it was at that point in time, I ended up going and getting um inpatient mental health support um through the military. And at that juncture, I knew that my top secret security clearance was done.

19:55.02

Stephanie Jacobs

Mmhmm.

19:56.21

Molly Mae Potter

I had lost the moon. If there was any shot at being an astronaut, I was never going to fly again in the Air Force. um

20:05.40

Molly Mae Potter

Best and worst day of my life.

20:06.86

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. Yeah. how did How did that realization make you feel in that moment?

20:07.51

Molly Mae Potter

Best and worst day.

20:11.54

Stephanie Jacobs

like

20:13.64

Molly Mae Potter

I remember sitting in inpatient mental health in Las Vegas or the Air Force said, you're going to go here, you're going to go get help, which by the way, I did not. It made me realize how broken our mental health system is in America. It's awful out that I was sitting there going, you know, two days ago I was flying in red flag with the best fighter pilots in the world. And now I'm sitting in inpatient mental health and they think I'm crazy.

20:40.51

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh my.

20:41.04

Molly Mae Potter

And I don't think I really want to be here on the face of this planet anymore. What value am I giving? i I've done everything and I've lost it all and I've lost the moon. So what has my life been about?

20:52.46

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

20:53.39

Molly Mae Potter

ah And at that time, I will say this has been a point of privilege in my life is that I have an amazing family and support.

21:04.10

Molly Mae Potter

And my mom basically stopped doing her job. She was working as a nurse, flew to Las Vegas and came and lived with me for a couple of weeks.

21:13.44

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh, wow.

21:13.66

Molly Mae Potter

And she got me through that time. And she was the one that worked with my military commander and everything, like helped me get through. I didn't have an advocate. Like I had no advocate.

21:21.77

Stephanie Jacobs

who

21:23.24

Molly Mae Potter

and my mom went all my appointments was my advocate talk to my commander how many

21:29.19

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

21:29.31

Molly Mae Potter

Again, I'm a grown woman, captain in the Air Force. But if I didn't have my mom as my advocate, I really don't know where I'd be. She made sure that even when I was in inpatient mental health and it wasn't working and I wasn't given the support, she pulled me out and made sure I got the right support.

21:38.44

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

21:45.73

Molly Mae Potter

you know She was the one that was helping to my commanders and like shielding me so that I had the safe space to just be broken and be OK being broken.

21:46.16

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, yeah.

21:54.63

Molly Mae Potter

and

21:55.28

Stephanie Jacobs

Right, right.

21:55.59

Molly Mae Potter

and And that was just something that I realized so many people don't have and we're the you're going to make it and maybe you're not going to make it, that divide can happen.

22:08.88

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm. Definitely. Yeah, it really sheds light on this, perhaps hole in the system. That's just not enough support for people who really need it in those moments.

22:19.73

Stephanie Jacobs

Now, did you have, I mean, you shared so much about and the mental health and like how this really affected you and the trauma from it. Did you have an actual injury to that that was long standing to your body physically or your brain?

22:35.87

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

22:36.59

Stephanie Jacobs

Okay,

22:37.59

Molly Mae Potter

So what's what's interesting about that is it didn't get diagnosed until um after all of this happened, because I kept remember suppressing everything. Didn't go to mental health, didn't do all this. ah Have found out ah years later through multiple MRIs that not only did I had a massive concussion, and you can see the brain tissue healing over the years.

23:03.48

Molly Mae Potter
It's still there.

23:05.14
Stephanie Jacobs
Wow.

23:05.36
Molly Mae Potter
um I actually had a recent MRI a couple weeks ago because they're still monitoring it, but it also pushed my brain about 10 millimeters back into my spinal column.

23:07.77
Stephanie Jacobs
Mhm.

23:15.21
Molly Mae Potter
um Over the past few years, I've had like I had extreme back pain.

23:20.16
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm hmm.

23:20.40
Molly Mae Potter
um I had um really a lot of difficulties focusing. um it was It was amazing, like ah the years following the blast and just just ah injury, um like I couldn't sit down and read a book and I had no focus.

23:34.64
Molly Mae Potter
And that was also part of the issue that I had with my job. Well, it turns out that's like a huge side effect of traumatic brain injury.

23:37.23
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

23:42.72
Molly Mae Potter
And it wasn't until I Again, finally got help, but I got a speech pathologist who, by the way, helps with focus and reading and and reteaching your brain how to wire itself. I have had crazy hearing issues that have, you know, that finally got addressed. And I was having issues with hearing while I was um um in the military post a blast injury, but all my hearing tests came back positive.

24:10.23
Molly Mae Potter
It wasn't that I couldn't hear the sounds. It was my brain wasn't processing the sound.

24:14.19

Stephanie Jacobs
Okay, yep.

24:15.12

Molly Mae Potter

So people would say things to me and it'd be like, you didn't even tell me. So it was like i it it was more about sound processing and especially if it's a really noisy environment and there's a lot going on and you're talking to me, I can't hear you because my brain can't process that sound.

24:26.27

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

24:29.66

Stephanie Jacobs

And that's still yet today, you're saying.

24:29.73

Molly Mae Potter

um Oh, yeah, for sure.

24:31.75

Stephanie Jacobs

Or, yeah.

24:32.90

Molly Mae Potter

Absolutely.

24:32.97

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hmm.

24:33.26

Molly Mae Potter

Like if I go into a restaurant, like I have to wear hearing aids. And the hearing aids is not because I can't hear sound. It's I have to augment the sound that's coming from a singular direction that i'm I'm looking at so I can actually, like my it helps focus my brain to process the sound and go, oh yeah, like you're talking to me and I can hear you.

24:49.95

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

24:53.09

Stephanie Jacobs

Hmm.

24:53.26

Molly Mae Potter

It and it puts that sound above the ambient sound.

24:57.26

Stephanie Jacobs
the other sounds. Yeah.

24:58.59

Molly Mae Potter

So all these hearing issues I was having, and they're like, you don't have hearing loss. You don't have hearing loss. Now suddenly, it like all started to click once I started to get help. And they're like, yeah, you have sound processing. You have um you also have issues with focus. You have had sleep issues. um Mix that with PTSD um you know and getting with that. And then all of your back pain and things like that that you're having as well.

25:26.59

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah, your brain got pushed down into your spinal column. And we see this big like mass on your head where all of this happened. Yeah, makes sense. But I was, I was trying to overcompensate by pushing other people away, not seeing that I was really struggling with things in memory.

25:43.91

Stephanie Jacobs
Right.

25:43.98

Molly Mae Potter

Um, and when you're alone and you're not married and you don't have kids and you have an apartment, all you do is work. You can start to do all of these things to hide how bad things are until you can't anymore.

25:55.51

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. Yeah, and you and like you said, you didn't fully understand what was going on either.

25:58.14

Molly Mae Potter
it

26:02.16

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah. Yeah.

26:03.06

Stephanie Jacobs

So it's hard if there's no one around to really be watching and seeing how you're processing things and the behaviors and stuff either they can't even help you.

26:12.33

Molly Mae Potter

I went from being a rocket scientist to not being able to process reading a book.

26:17.97

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow. Wow. That's, and again, like you, I asked you like how it made you feel when you had to be checked into the inpatient hospital and like, you know, you answered that question.

26:31.73

Stephanie Jacobs

It makes me think again, like how that made you feel like knowing you were a rocket scientist and that's who you are in your identity. And then you couldn't even process and read a book or, or these things like what?

26:45.13

Molly Mae Potter

I felt like damaged goods. I felt like damaged goods to my family, like that I had let them down, that I lied to them about how bad things were.

26:47.14

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh.

26:56.25

Molly Mae Potter

I felt like damaged goods to the Air Force. I wasn't going to be needed anymore. And I felt like everything that I had worked for had just gone down the drain.

27:04.23

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

27:05.21

Molly Mae Potter

And I didn't really feel like there was anything that was next.

27:08.54

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

27:09.28

Molly Mae Potter

um

27:09.96

Stephanie Jacobs

That's a, that's a really, you know, just trying to imagine that as someone who obviously hasn't gone through that experience, but really trying to put myself in your shoes. Like that is a low of lowest points.

27:23.34

Stephanie Jacobs

If it feels like it would be that just like you said, like, what do I do next?

27:30.84

Molly Mae Potter

And I think also at that time, my perception of what it means to now be like a damaged, good veteran in 2010 was, Oh, I'm one of the people that you pity.

27:42.86

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

27:45.93

Molly Mae Potter

And I like. Like, I am I am one of those that's come back from Afghanistan that's going to be broken, and I'm going to be labeled as such for the rest of my life. um And my friend Chris, I was talking about earlier, um you know, when he went through his, he said that, you know, he felt like there was a pity, there was a charity case, and that people had low expectations of him.

27:55.46

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Yeah.

28:06.58

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

28:06.88

Molly Mae Potter

And there really wasn't this other narrative or this other support system that says no, you're going to get out of this. You're not a pity case freaking pull yourself up by your bootstraps. Look at everything you've done.

28:17.55

Molly Mae Potter

There's nothing that says that you're not still going to have this tenacity to go and like do epic stuff with your life, right?

28:21.58

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Right.

28:27.15

Molly Mae Potter

It was really my mom that was putting this like shell over me to like get me to this healing place. And um by suggestion of my mother and also with the the healing program I was going through with the military at the time, PCSC treat me sooner.

28:42.68

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

28:43.12

Molly Mae Potter

My mom's like, you know, we've got this family dog, Bella. I'm going to send Bella your way. And I was like, mom, the last thing I need in my life right now is Bella. And she's like, nope. Nope, I'm sending Bella your way. I was like, OK.

28:54.42

Molly Mae Potter

So she shipped the dog out to Las Vegas.

28:56.58

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

28:58.03

Molly Mae Potter

What's interesting about Bella is that um suddenly I had something other than myself I had to get out of bed for, to walk, to feed.

29:07.45

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

29:09.74

Molly Mae Potter

And Bella just wanted snuggles. But then something else interesting happened. you know I was going through all my therapy and things like that. um I was also really struggling with night terrors and sleeping and things like that.

29:22.73

Molly Mae Potter

Um, the first time it happened, I thought this dog's losing its mind. I'm going to have to send it back because it's waking me up from my sleep. The second time I was like, I put two and two together.

29:30.25

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

29:32.91

Molly Mae Potter

I was like, I was having a nightmare. She started clawing at me in the middle of the night on my chest and it hurt. Right.

29:38.82

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

29:39.63

Molly Mae Potter

But she realized I was having night terrors. Like I was like sweating and like, it was bad. She was waking me up from like, she was upset that I was upset. And she had this really calm demeanor and we thought, you know what?

29:53.31

Molly Mae Potter

maybe she would be a good service dog. And it turns out we got her not only trained up, we also got her certified and um she became um a service dog, and like through my therapy.

30:04.97

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah.

30:05.57

Molly Mae Potter

Well, then I went back as I was, the military is like, okay, you're going through this therapy. We got to kind of reintegrate you into the air force. I wasn't going to be able to do my job that I was doing before. Again, I didn't have my TS security clearance.

30:15.70

Molly Mae Potter

I couldn't even walk through the front door of my, my, um, squadron at that time. They're like, we got to figure out, you know, how are we going to do what's next for you?

30:24.46

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

30:25.30

Molly Mae Potter

And, uh, so, you know, here I am back in, in uniform and I've got my dog with me and they're like, what What the hell is this Air Force captain doing with this dog? And I was like, well, you guys issued her like to me.

30:38.06

Molly Mae Potter

here's all her like She had paperwork.

30:39.78

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hm.

30:40.02

Molly Mae Potter

Paperwork, right? like Through therapy that says this dog with this captain in uniform can be on base.

30:47.07

Stephanie Jacobs

Yep.

30:47.96

Molly Mae Potter

Well, the base captain or the base colonel at the time was like, you can't do that. And at this point in time, I knew like my days in the Air Force were numbered. and so

30:58.45

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

30:59.36

Molly Mae Potter

I was like, look, this is actually, I want to put a positive spin on this. I'm on my way out, but this dog is the reason I'm in uniform right now. And the reason I'm actually on base and the reason why I could walk through the door of any Air Force establishment at this point.

31:06.83

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

31:13.37

Stephanie Jacobs

right

31:13.76

Molly Mae Potter

So I directly emailed the chief of staff of the United States Air Force. And I said, I want to let you know what's going on. I'm captain Molly Bay Potter. Here I am.

31:24.54

Molly Mae Potter

And I want to let you know that One, not only has my command done the right thing by getting me the correct mental health support, and I've gotten great mental health support. Thank you. Two, instead of just shoving me out the door, you guys have me in uniform and you have me working a job on base, right?

31:33.35

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. Yeah.

31:39.16

Molly Mae Potter

It wasn't what I was doing before, but you're going to be back. You're getting me going.

31:41.49

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

31:42.61

Molly Mae Potter

And oh, by the way, the help the the the therapy that put me through like has issued me this this dog to help me get through the day. um I'm being told I can't bring this dog on base, but this I don't feel like this is right. um And the Army has all these protocols for dogs and helping service members get back into uniform. um Help me out here.

32:03.84
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

32:04.44
Molly Mae Potter
And he wrote me back within 15 minutes and and like CC'd like the whole chain leadership.

32:06.75
Stephanie Jacobs
Wow.

32:09.64
Molly Mae Potter
So I like, I had a shit storm.

32:10.00
Stephanie Jacobs
yeah ha

32:12.25
Molly Mae Potter
And but to to say the least of like this email chain, right?

32:16.49
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

32:16.99
Molly Mae Potter
I kicked up a lot of dirt with that one. And he, he responded his name was General Welsh, Mark Welsh, ah Chief of Staff of the Air Force at the time. He said, this is absolutely wonderful. I'll see you in Bella in DC in two weeks and we're going to change it.

32:29.79
Molly Mae Potter
And two weeks later, I went to Washington DC. I've met with Mark Welsh. I also met with Eric Fanning, who was the Undersecretary of the Air Force at the time. And we met with the um lead vets for the Army who had the veterinary um group

32:45.81
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm hmm.

32:46.36
Molly Mae Potter
And the Air Force actually does all the military working dogs. And they started to change um ah policy.

32:51.24

Stephanie Jacobs
Okay.

32:54.34
Molly Mae Potter

And so at that point in time, ah any active duty Air Force airmen that was going through commander mandated therapy and had um done all the checks with the dogs and things like that and had the appropriate paperwork was allowed on base in uniform in formation.

33:14.15
Molly Mae Potter

which is huge to think about like the uniformity of that.

33:14.68
Stephanie Jacobs
Wow.

33:16.72
Molly Mae Potter

And they said, this is going to be a step that we're going to take.

33:17.07
Stephanie Jacobs
Yes.

33:18.84
Molly Mae Potter

It's working with the Army. We're just going to make this happen. And so um in November of 2013, I exited the United States Air Force with an honorable discharge, um having changed policy ah so that airmen behind me could also have a military working dog.

33:36.86
Molly Mae Potter

and um integrated with the help that I needed to not only help my ah brain injury, ah my therapy, and everything else that I needed moving forward.

33:47.88
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

33:48.33
Molly Mae Potter

So um I'm not going to say that's the end of this the story, right but you know it ended on on a note that I can be proud of.

33:52.64
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

33:57.64
Stephanie Jacobs

Right. That's what I was just going to say. I mean, to have gone through so much and be at such a breaking point, like we were talking and to come out on the other side of that in, like you said, something you're proud of and that you were able to move forward and heal and your mother was a great part of that and Bella and yeah.

34:17.75

Molly Mae Potter

And it was really my whole family. right like it it was My mom was there for me in person, but um my parents just having a lot of empathy and just saying, like we're proud of you and supporting me.

34:28.59

Molly Mae Potter

right like that That was big.

34:29.07

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm.

34:29.95

Molly Mae Potter

And I realized that's not something that everyone has, because I did. I left the Air Force. It's a good story, but I also left with a lot of shame. right like that was It was not where I was still going.

34:40.85

Molly Mae Potter

I still felt like damaged goods. The story on paper sounds good.

34:43.66

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, okay, that's important. Yeah, right, right.

34:46.10

Molly Mae Potter

But I still felt like, what am I doing with my life? I i left the military. I had no job. had like What was I going to go do with my life?

34:53.33

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm.

34:53.98

Molly Mae Potter

so So that sense of still feeling like I don't have a purpose and that shame was still very much there.

35:00.96

Stephanie Jacobs

Right. Right. And when you left and it was an honorable discharge, um, was that like a mutual, like you were wanting to leave, right? You were ready because you just, you.

35:09.99
Molly Mae Potter
Yeah, I needed to move on.

35:12.17
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

35:12.35
Molly Mae Potter
like

35:12.37
Stephanie Jacobs
You just couldn't continue to stay there after everything that happened.

35:15.28
Molly Mae Potter
I wasn't going to be able to fly. I wasn't going to be able, you know, like it, it just didn't make sense, right.

35:16.83
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

35:20.54
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm-hmm.

35:20.81
Molly Mae Potter
And ah I requested to leave early because I had still some commitments left.

35:21.36
Stephanie Jacobs
Mm-hmm.

35:25.55
Molly Mae Potter
And so I put in the paperwork to request to be um exited early, and that was granted based off of the the circumstances.

35:31.78
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah. Right.

35:33.82
Molly Mae Potter
um and And I just felt like I needed to rip the band-aid off sooner rather than later because if I was going to start new, I felt behind.

35:42.06

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm hmm.

35:42.92

Molly Mae Potter

Like I'd been in the military for seven years and everyone else had been out and getting other jobs and, you know, like doing the corporate milestones or whatever I was expected to do at that point in time.

35:49.83

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, for sure.

35:55.94

Molly Mae Potter

And that was just, ah I did. I felt, I felt behind. I felt ashamed. I felt like damaged goods still. And I felt like I was a little bit meandering in life.

36:04.55

Stephanie Jacobs

I can totally understand that perspective and just having come from where you were, what you were dealing with and yet also like you had come so far from where you were.

36:16.31

Stephanie Jacobs

And so it was, it was like, okay, I've made it through, I've healed enough to move on and I'm, I'm proud of what I've done.

36:16.63

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

36:23.48

Stephanie Jacobs

I've done my best, but I also, I'm disappointed in, in, in all of it.

36:26.63

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

36:28.22

Stephanie Jacobs

And so, okay. So then when you were discharged, what, what happened next? Where did you go next?

36:33.59

Molly Mae Potter

I went and I worked at a running shoe store for \$11 an hour because I could take my dog.

36:38.31

Stephanie Jacobs
And you had a lot of running experience.

36:39.99
Molly Mae Potter
And I was really good at still running away from things in my life.

36:43.80
Stephanie Jacobs
Oh, there you go.

36:44.60
Molly Mae Potter
So I became an ultra runner. Like I have done some serious ultra running.

36:46.97
Stephanie Jacobs
Oh, okay.

36:50.06
Molly Mae Potter
And this was the time before it was like a big trend. Like, like, yeah it's like, Oh, you're gonna go run 50 miles?

36:52.85
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah, yeah.

36:55.63
Molly Mae Potter
Like, why would you do that? that. Like, that wasn't like a mainstream cool thing to do. I was running away from my problems at that time is what I was doing.

36:59.74
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

37:02.67
Molly Mae Potter
And and so I worked at a running shoe store part time, basically applying to every job I could and getting denied from every job I could, because there weren't those, there weren't those services yet to help you transition into your new role, right?

37:16.53
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah, yeah.

37:17.14
Molly Mae Potter
um and um And so I thought, well, no one's going to hire me. um And I don't know how to translate my experience into things that are relevant um with job postings online.

37:31.50
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

37:32.11
Molly Mae Potter
So I'm just going to go back and get my PhD. I'm going to go back to being that nerdy engineer. I applied to every PhD school, got into all of them. Like all the top engineering PhD schools I got into.

37:40.48
Stephanie Jacobs
There you go.

37:44.19
Molly Mae Potter
ah Got into Colorado School of Mines um to go back and get a PhD in metallurgy.

37:50.86
Stephanie Jacobs
Wow.

37:51.09
Molly Mae Potter
ah High temperature metallurgy, like my thing was like tungsten, like super geeky, nerdy. and and was going to go to Colorado. And I figured, OK, well, you know, this was the spring of 2014.

38:02.11
Molly Mae Potter
I've got everything um you know lined up to start in the fall.

38:05.99
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

38:06.08
Molly Mae Potter
um And we're just going to go reinvent o ourselves through a PhD program. And the GI Bill, right?

38:12.53
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah, that's a great idea.

38:15.08
Molly Mae Potter
um And then I got this call in March of 2014 from a gentleman by the name of John D. Andrea, who I'll forever be grateful for at Dell Technologies.

38:27.59
Molly Mae Potter

um And he said, hey, so I'm looking for a validation test program manager. It looks like you're a test engineer. And I i just have a team that's a mess. like, just a mess. And, and I, I love the fact that you're the military, so you're going to be commanding.

38:40.53

Molly Mae Potter

And you've got test background. Like, what do you say? but Why don't you come and help us figure it out?

38:43.36

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

38:45.05

Molly Mae Potter

And I was like, Oh, thanks. But you know, I'm on my way to go get my PhD. And then he told me how much money I'd make in tech. And I was like, I'll be right there.

38:51.54

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah Wow.

38:53.10

Molly Mae Potter

And that is how I started ah my journey in tech. But like, I know John,

38:56.85

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm

38:59.01

Molly Mae Potter

Went to bat for me like I know that the position that he hired me into was um coveted I realized that he took a chance on me um coming straight from the military into like corporate America into computers and and I remember in the interview one of the interviewers was like ah Why do you think you're qualified for this job?

39:00.85

Stephanie Jacobs

hmm.

39:20.84

Molly Mae Potter

This is like testing laptops and things like that. You have no experience with this and I was like I've been testing like billion dollar aircraft with billions of line of code, I think I can figure out a laptop.

39:34.92

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, yeah.

39:35.01

Molly Mae Potter
And I think that was the moment I got hired.

39:37.06
Stephanie Jacobs
They're like, oh wait, that makes so much sense.

39:39.66
Molly Mae Potter
I was like, I've been flying like super I've been like testing flying supercomputers, like I'll be able to figure this out and the missiles that are shooting at them and all of the like the electronics interface in between.

39:46.44
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

39:51.43
Molly Mae Potter
Like I got you.

39:53.03
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

39:53.13
Molly Mae Potter
um And they're like, oh, well, we're also an international team. You don't have experience with that. i was like um Afghanistan is like the melting pot of like the world and world politics.

40:01.53
Stephanie Jacobs
andan

40:05.46
Molly Mae Potter
ah like i could I can do this. I got it, right? If I can like bargain in Afghanistan, I got this.

40:08.13
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

40:12.50
Molly Mae Potter
I got this. And um he really just opened up a door for a whole new kind of career opportunity for me to just grow and thrive. and um

40:22.79
Stephanie Jacobs
That's awesome.

40:25.30

Molly Mae Potter

And that's when I got introduced also to Miss Veteran America, is kind of during the timeframe.

40:29.17

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, I was going to ask about that. Yeah, so how how did you get introduced to them? How did that go?

40:36.20

Molly Mae Potter

So someone at Dell, ah because I was doing, this is at the time now when like joining forces and some of the other veteran hiring initiatives that came out of the White House were starting to pop up on the scenes and Dell was like, who are our vets?

40:48.68

Molly Mae Potter

Who have we hired? How can we make a VR stunt?

40:49.66

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

40:51.26

Molly Mae Potter

And so I got put as like the the voice of kind of veteran hiring for Dell. And someone was like, Oh, you should totally be like Miss Veteran USA. Well, someone was googling Miss Veteran USA to find a really funny meme and found out it was a real program.

41:04.90

Molly Mae Potter

It was like, Hey, Molly, you should do this.

41:05.87

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh my gosh, the happenstance of that.

41:06.86

Molly Mae Potter

And I was like, Oh my God. Yeah. So it started as a joke because I didn't even know it exists.

41:11.21

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

41:12.64

Molly Mae Potter

And they're like, no, you should really go do this. I was like, no way. And they were like, no, like you're a good voice. You should go do this. I was like, I don't do beauty pageants. That's not what I do.

41:20.82

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah

41:21.23

Molly Mae Potter

And they're like, it's not a beauty pageant. It actually looks like a competition, like legit. You should check it out. And so in 2016, I ran for Miss Veteran America, which is um And it's a competition to support an organization called Final Salute that helps provide safe and suitable housing for homeless women, veteran and their children, or just really women, veterans that are going through that tough time that don't have that additional family support.

41:36.28

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

41:45.20

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

41:45.28

Molly Mae Potter

um So it's not just necessarily homelessness. It's, it's all the things that could lead to homelessness and providing that support and that empowerment.

41:50.48

Stephanie Jacobs

Right, yes.

41:52.94

Molly Mae Potter

But Miss Veteran America is an empowerment program that brings women veterans together to start telling their stories. um And that's when I started actually talking about my military experience. Before that, I didn't really talk about it at all or what happened. But Miss Veteran America um forced me to get involved with my community.

42:13.80

Molly Mae Potter

um prove that I could be an engaging leader. and And really, that's how you get selected is, Are you an engaging leader?

42:17.17

Stephanie Jacobs

i

42:20.96

Molly Mae Potter

Can you articulate on the issues? Can we put you in front of a camera? And you're not going to embarrass women veterans everywhere.

42:26.92

Stephanie Jacobs
Right.

42:27.11

Molly Mae Potter

And to be able to articulate, like, not only your experience, but why it matters to your broader communities and just starting this movement of community community engagement with women veterans. so And I won.

42:37.58

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

42:41.47

Stephanie Jacobs

Way to go. That is incredible.

42:43.11

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

42:43.96

Stephanie Jacobs

So, and as you were sharing your story on this platform and advocating for other women that have different but similar stories and in a way, right?

42:52.95

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

42:53.49

Stephanie Jacobs

Was it healing to you? Did it further kind of grow that healing process inside of you?

42:59.11

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah, so Miss veteran in America was an awkward year for me, because I've been a really private person, like I am a very private person. And, um and it forced me to start talking and sharing my story and then realizing that there were so many similarities out there. And um it also It allowed me to connect with just some incredible women.

43:22.64

Molly Mae Potter

So I would say, like, the biggest thing that I got out of this veteran America were, one, my best friend in the entire world, Charlinda Scales, who is the CEO and founder of Mutt Sauce, and just so a whirlwind, amazing entrepreneur.

43:31.29

Stephanie Jacobs

fine

43:37.69
Molly Mae Potter
um

43:37.80
Stephanie Jacobs
Who by the way is going to be on the podcast.

43:40.28
Molly Mae Potter
She is awesome.

43:40.97
Stephanie Jacobs
Yes, yes.

43:41.26
Molly Mae Potter
OK, well, you got to listen to her show. So Charlotte and I are besties. where it We're BFS. um And her journey is incredible. And then um ah Makita Young, Tai Young, um she's a cancer survivor in her 30s.

43:57.70
Molly Mae Potter
And she went back to PA school. um And she just graduated from Wake Forest PA school. And ah quite literally today was briefing the President of the United States on the um ah rescue and the ah cleanup efforts in Western North Carolina from the Army National Guard.

44:15.44
Stephanie Jacobs
Oh, wow.

44:17.52
Molly Mae Potter
So she's still in the the Army National Guard or the Guard of the Reserves.

44:20.48
Stephanie Jacobs
Yep.

44:21.45
Molly Mae Potter
I can't remember. After PA school, I can't remember what she switched to. But anyways, but she's been doing all of those, the efforts in Western North Carolina. like These are the women I got connected to. And these are amazing, c incredible women doing awesome things.

44:29.58
Stephanie Jacobs
That's incredible.

44:33.14

Molly Mae Potter

they're not quote unquote, what we sort like charity cases. right So it's ah as part of being that empowerment program.

44:36.62

Stephanie Jacobs

Right.

44:38.58

Molly Mae Potter

And that's when I realized, oh, I can be a part of empowerment movements, not part of like the pity and charity case.

44:43.13

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

44:46.61

Molly Mae Potter

But I have to speak up, and I have to be a part of that conversation.

44:49.12

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

44:50.70

Molly Mae Potter

And I think the biggest thing I learned that year was when women veterans don't speak up or sit at the table, they're on the menu. And people pick and choose

44:59.47

Stephanie Jacobs

oh

45:01.72

Molly Mae Potter

the services and the support for them, they become the charity case. They, it's not an empowerment.

45:07.79

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

45:08.35

Molly Mae Potter

And they don't drive like their own destiny. And so I got finally surrounded by women that were driving their own destiny and were just awesome.

45:19.75

Stephanie Jacobs

That sounds like a turning point. I mean, you went from a point of saying like, what am I going to do next? I feel like damaged goods to this place of sharing your story and finding this group of women who had some similarities in these connections with really incredible people.

45:27.87

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

45:37.04

Stephanie Jacobs

And you're realizing sharing your own story is creating this space where you can have more strength and confidence. And just, it sounds like your entire like outlook and self image.

45:50.33

Stephanie Jacobs

transformed through that.

45:52.03

Molly Mae Potter

It felt like I had a sense of belonging to a broader community that I was needed in my community.

45:57.23

Stephanie Jacobs

ah yeah

45:58.30

Molly Mae Potter

And I became a community leader here in Austin, Texas through that. I met just really great people. And then the narrative became more about the awesome things that veterans are doing post-Afghanistan.

46:08.53

Molly Mae Potter

um

46:09.20

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

46:09.73

Molly Mae Potter

and Iraq, and even those that didn't deploy the skill sets that they have to do really cool things and tech and innovation and leadership and helping drive this country forward in a much more unified way. And ah being that it is October 2024, I think the bigger thing that's been more important to me lately is on the political front and that the veterans that I am seeing that are engaged in a community are a much more uniting voice.

46:34.04

Stephanie Jacobs

ad Mmhmm.

46:41.18

Molly Mae Potter

um ah Republicans and Democrats, veterans coming together and going yeah like, we're here to support our country.

46:48.69

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes, yes.

46:48.95

Molly Mae Potter

um And we believe in the broader vision of what America is still going to be, right? A more perfect union.

46:59.68

Stephanie Jacobs

yes

47:00.39

Molly Mae Potter

And, um and I think that is just something so critical that is needed with a veteran voice. Like we're here to, we believe in America. We signed up voluntarily unless, you know, you're a Vietnam vet really at this point.

47:14.50

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

47:14.71

Molly Mae Potter

ah to to really give our life for this country, and we really believe in it, and and driving more unification, not the separation, um trying to just get things done for what we believe is the greater good for America and putting separation aside.

47:33.10

Molly Mae Potter

that's That's what you do in the military. I don't care what your socioeconomic background was. There's people that came from some of the most broken homes that i I would never be able to relate to other than we both shared this military service and together we were there just to get things done.

47:45.74

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah Yeah.

47:47.85

Molly Mae Potter

um I came from a very privileged background. I served with those that didn't. i I was born in America. I served with those that were not born in America. um I And you're just there to focus on

unifying and and moving things forward. And I think that is so, so needed in this political landscape right now.

48:06.52

Stephanie Jacobs

Oh my gosh, it is so critical and it seems more than ever, at least from my short time span of living in the United States as a young person, but just just seeing the division that's happened over even the last five years has been really something to watch.

48:16.43

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

48:26.09

Stephanie Jacobs

and

48:26.80

Molly Mae Potter

It's gut wrenching.

48:27.12

Stephanie Jacobs

um Yeah, it's it is and so I love that you're saying that and and offering that perspective because it really is such a beautiful picture of These people this group of people veterans that care and love for our country and care about the unification and and not that division and those dividing lines and just that That's that's what we need Yeah

48:47.24

Molly Mae Potter

Yeah.

48:51.19

Molly Mae Potter

It is. And um you know every year I go, I've got a group of veteran friends who are just doing cool, awesome things. You want to talk about empowerment, right? Running their own businesses, doing cool community influencing.

48:59.76

Stephanie Jacobs

and Yes.

49:03.00

Molly Mae Potter

And um we go to Montana and we sit around a campfire and we just disconnect from the world and we kind of reset together. And like to be able to openly talk about politics and the way we think about things and just this, like, gosh, I wish I could have that for the rest of America right now.

49:18.17

Molly Mae Potter

Like just sitting around this campfire in Montana, just being with each other, not on devices and having these open conversations and all different perspectives.

49:24.91

Stephanie Jacobs
yeah

49:28.76

Molly Mae Potter

If I could grant America one wish right now, it would be that we all have one big beautiful campfire somewhere in Montana and look at the stars and disconnect from our devices and have real authentic conversations and share perspectives and share stories and and really unite on a way forward.

49:43.67

Stephanie Jacobs
Yes.

49:46.47

Molly Mae Potter

That would be my one wish for America at this point as a veteran.

49:49.79

Stephanie Jacobs

i I love it. i That's a ah beautiful picture in a lot of ways or a micro way. I feel like you're helping to drive that conversation just by sharing your story today and and sharing what's on your heart and and hopefully as people are listening to your story, they can better understand um from one story, one perspective of someone who um had a traumatic experience in the Air Force and and coming back and all the things you are you're doing since. And I think it's your story is such a beautiful depiction of the purpose behind this podcast and just that

50:27.97

Stephanie Jacobs

that love and that light and that bringing people together and uniting and trying to to bring light out of what is difficult and and finding that and moving it forward. If you hadn't had this experience as difficult it as it is, and I do not want to downplay it by any means, um but I i hope, you not not I hope. I say I hope because I hope I'm not, um you know, say overstepping by saying this, but I i can see a part of,

50:56.08

Stephanie Jacobs

um The fact that you have this traumatic experience yourself has led you on a really different trajectory to ultimately um help a lot of people that are in need that have similar experiences to yourself and just bringing that light.

51:13.16

Stephanie Jacobs

And um you know, maybe I can ask you, I guess, is is that an accurate depiction? Like, do you think you would be doing what you're doing today without, you know, where this experience led you ultimately?

51:19.09
Molly Mae Potter
Yeah.

51:25.98
Molly Mae Potter
No, and I think it puts a lot of things into perspective. You know, when people are stressed at work, I'm like, did anyone shoot at you today? Like, you know, are you solving world peace right now?

51:32.39
Stephanie Jacobs
Mmhmm. Yeah. Yeah.

51:36.30
Molly Mae Potter
Take a deep breath. It's all good. I got your back. um And you know i I've had a really successful career in tech, but I also have been now more engaging in my community than I think I would have been before.

51:40.56
Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah.

51:52.29
Molly Mae Potter
um

51:52.43
Stephanie Jacobs
Mmhmm.

51:53.22
Molly Mae Potter
And i'm I'm just a lot more grateful for the things that I have in my life that I recognize also as a privilege.

52:04.40
Stephanie Jacobs
and none Yeah.

52:04.70
Molly Mae Potter
I've got wonderful health right now. um i've got to you know I've got great healthcare. I don't feel like the military owes me anything. i have they Look, they broke it.

52:15.31
Molly Mae Potter
They're fixing it. like I have actually great healthcare through the VA, by the way.

52:16.44

Stephanie Jacobs
Yeah. yeah

52:19.83

Molly Mae Potter

It's wonderful. There's this there's this broken story about the VA healthcare. My VA a healthcare care' is wonderful. Is the VA perfect? No, but is the rest of America healthcare perfect?

52:29.05

Stephanie Jacobs

No, definitely not.

52:29.37

Molly Mae Potter

No, not at all. And, and, and, you know, like, I get compensated, right, monthly for what happened to me as well. I don't feel like I'm owed anything.

52:39.76

Molly Mae Potter

I also got additional education experiences. I went back on, you know, the, on the GI Bill, I got my, my MBA, like,

52:43.81

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

52:46.96

Molly Mae Potter

I, it's part of who, who I am, but it's made me just have a different perspective on life. I really appreciate the simplistic things that I have, of the privileges I have, my health, my family, um the support that I have, um and, and that I'm able to, to really have this platform where people listen to me.

52:57.42

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

53:05.13

Molly Mae Potter

It, it legitimizes my experiences, but it also legitimizes my healing. And it also legitimizes, like, the resiliency that veterans have, and that we're not this broken generation of post-9-11 vets.

53:21.11

Stephanie Jacobs

Right, right, for sure.

53:21.20

Molly Mae Potter

um And i I think now, you know, my parents never talked about their service. My grandfather certainly never talked about a service. And that's why, like, going back to how we started all of

this conversation, I never knew that, like, my parents, like, and being veterans were really, like, a thing because they never talked about it.

53:37.60

Stephanie Jacobs

if

53:38.95

Molly Mae Potter

And now that my mom, um sorry, mom, I'm going to give away your age, you know, is in her 70s and is a Vietnam era vet, people look at her and they don't, they would never thank her for her service. If she parks in the veteran-only parking space, people are going to think, crazy old woman, you're parking in, you know, the veteran parking space, get out.

53:55.28

Molly Mae Potter

Never realizing, like, because her generation just didn't tell her story. um And so another cool thing I got to do with Miss Veteran America was, like,

53:59.34

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah.

54:02.35

Molly Mae Potter

I brought my mom along to everything and I was like, you can thank me for my service, but also thank my mom. and

54:07.54

Stephanie Jacobs

yeah Yes. Oh, I love that.

54:08.32

Molly Mae Potter

um

54:09.14

Stephanie Jacobs

That's so beautiful.

54:10.21

Molly Mae Potter

and and I think there's a really um interesting opportunity that's coming up. so This is kind of my big ask at the end here. is um theres i Because of my connections with the veteran community and being engaged, I got a ah ah special invitation to a South by Southwest screening here in Austin, Texas for a new movie that's coming out.

54:16.92

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

54:29.97

Molly Mae Potter

It's called My Dead Friend Zoe, and it's written written and directed by Kyle Hausman-Stokes, ah who after his tour in Iraq um went back on the GI Bill to film school. And so this movie is really kind of a compilation of some of his experiences, not only in Iraq, but also as as a veteran. And it's about um to women and their experience coming back um from a deployment and um also the the interaction with like regular society, family interactions for how do you deal with post-traumatic stressors and experiences and then the connective tissue to other veteran generations, the the Vietnam veteran generations. And what this movie does is it opens up a platform for conversation about the veteran experience.

55:22.80

Stephanie Jacobs

Mm-hm.

55:23.62

Molly Mae Potter

um It's been going to all the film festivals. It's winning lots of prizes and awards. It's been really cool to see this this really gained recognition that it deserves. um I think it's the most accurate portrayal of the veteran experience that I have seen hands down, ah period, for post 9-11 veterans.

55:40.27

Stephanie Jacobs

Wow.

55:41.57

Molly Mae Potter

But it's not just about post 9-11 veterans, it's about the veteran experience. And so my ask is of this. It comes out February 28th. and theaters across America. um I don't want just veterans to go see it.

55:53.56

Molly Mae Potter

I want everyone to go see it to open up the conversation about the veteran experience. There's not just one veteran story. There's millions of veteran stories.

56:04.38

Stephanie Jacobs

Yes.

56:04.53

Molly Mae Potter

um and And to drive a bigger conversation about about the veteran experience, the comic relief we use, the friendships, those experiences that you can't necessarily translate once you get back home into and to the Walmart parking lot, you know, they just night and day.

56:19.31

Stephanie Jacobs

her

56:21.06

Molly Mae Potter

And um so when it comes out, I'm going to take my my family, but I'm also going to take my friends that are not veterans um and see what questions they have for me about this film and and some of these nuances.

56:34.63

Molly Mae Potter

So my dead friend Zoe comes out um February 28th. I'm not associated with the film. i None of that, I just really, really hit a nerve. It's just an incredible script.

56:49.13

Molly Mae Potter

um the The film itself has Ed Harris in it. It's got Morgan Friedman in it. It's got some big heavy hitters.

57:00.06

Stephanie Jacobs
and

57:00.23

Molly Mae Potter

Go see it, please, and start talking.

57:01.18

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah, I love that because I was going to ask as if there's any call to actions for those who are listening and how they can further this conversation and or learn more or get involved with it advocacy.

57:14.16

Stephanie Jacobs

And one of the things I really believe in a big part of why this show exists is that really advocacy begins with understanding and understanding each other.

57:24.61

Stephanie Jacobs
and

57:25.08

Molly Mae Potter
Yep.

57:25.53

Stephanie Jacobs

um and i Essentially, that's what you're saying. like go Go see this so you can ask questions. You can try to engage in the narrative. You can better understand it and empathize and and all of that because really it's through other stories that we can learn the most because we haven't experienced it ourselves.

57:43.35

Stephanie Jacobs
and so The next best thing right is is through other stories.

57:44.21
Molly Mae Potter
Yeah.

57:47.55
Stephanie Jacobs
and so um Thank you so much for putting that plug in there. Everybody go see my dead friend Zoe. um I'll put it on my calendar certainly and I really appreciate you mentioning that. um Well this has been just such an incredible conversation. um You did you made my job very easy. I didn't even have to ask a lot of questions and I love that. um you You're so well spoken and your story really is There's a lot of powerful points to it and I i thank you for just what you've you've done in the purpose that you've realized through your own experience and um just how you're able to share that with others and help help advocate on behalf of other women especially, right? And in that empowerment piece, um helping them get back into society and supporting them. so

58:45.18
Stephanie Jacobs
Thank you, Molly Mae. I appreciate you being on here and this wonderful conversation.

58:51.67
Molly Mae Potter
Thanks so much. And you know I feel like this is only, sorry, if you're my dog in the background, he's not like, it's it's mealtime. You've talked long enough.

58:58.48
Stephanie Jacobs
That's great. Great.

58:59.69
Molly Mae Potter
Yeah, but here it is.

58:59.79
Stephanie Jacobs
He's here. Yeah.

59:01.30
Molly Mae Potter
But um i you know I feel like ah there's more to my story that I also still need to tell. and And you've really encouraged me to kind of open up a little bit more about it.

59:07.62
Stephanie Jacobs
and

59:10.79
Molly Mae Potter
So thank you. Thanks for giving me the space to go do that.

59:11.64

Stephanie Jacobs

Yeah. Yeah, you're welcome. All right. Well, thank you and have a great rest of your day.

59:18.69

Molly Mae Potter

You too.