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Episode 37: How to find Meaning and Fulfillment with Isaac Banks

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(Music playing)

Mindy Henderson:

Welcome to the Quest Podcast, proudly presented by the Muscular Dystrophy Association as part of the Quest family of content. I'm your host, Mindy Henderson. Together we are here to bring thoughtful conversation to the neuromuscular disease community and beyond about issues affecting those with neuromuscular disease and other disabilities and those who love them. We are here for you to educate and inform, to demystify, to inspire and to entertain. We are here shining a light on all that makes you, you. Whether you are one of us, love someone who is or are on another journey altogether, thanks for joining. Now, let's get started.

Today's show is all about finding fulfillment in our lives as we skyrocket into 2024. The gentleman I have with me today has such an interesting set of experiences and stories that have led him to find genuine fulfillment in his own life, and I invited him here today to talk to me about how we can all do the same. Of all the obstacles that could stop Isaac Banks, muscular dystrophy is not one of them. At the age of eight, Isaac was misdiagnosed as having Duchenne muscular dystrophy by a family doctor. When he was 21 though, doctors noticed Isaac's diagnosis wasn't progressing as expected. After contacting MDA, he was tested and the results revealed that he was actually living with limb-girdle muscular dystrophy. Isaac has since found a successful career in corporate America. He's a talented public speaker and has designed a comprehensive diversity, equity, and inclusion program as well as a servant leadership for management program.

Over the years, Isaac participated in various programs provided by MDA, including one of my favorites, MDA Summer Camp, and he speaks about the

profound ways that summer camp set him up for success in life and molded him into the deeply fulfilled person he is today, spending as much time as he can giving back. Isaac, welcome.

- Isaac Banks:** Thank you so much for having me. This is such a blessing to be here today.
- Mindy Henderson:** Oh, I'm so excited to talk to you. You and I spoke a couple of weeks ago and I have just been waiting for this conversation because you made me laugh, you made me cry. You made me feel all the feels. I think that as we're starting the new year, a lot of people are talking about goals and resolutions and things like that, but like I said in that intro, we really just wanted to explore this idea of finding fulfillment in our lives. And so, you, I think, are kind of the epitome of that. You are such a happy person and that came through in spades while we were talking. And so, I'm just going to jump in with some questions. So Isaac, you have a really unique diagnosis story as I alluded to again in that introduction. Would you mind just starting there and sharing that story with us?
- Isaac Banks:** Sure. Sure. So I'm one of seven kids. We grew up in rural America, southern Illinois. I'm the third of three boys with muscular dystrophy in my family. So the oldest three boys had it and the younger two don't. I have two older sisters that also don't.
- So growing up, my brother Matt, the oldest, they noticed he was walking kind of funny, the typical signs of waddling, kind of the leg pigeon-toed. So the family doctor said, "Hey, I think we need to test him for something. Something just isn't right." So they went in and they did a muscle tissue test, and this was back in 1977-ish. So it was pretty barbaric back then. I guess it was a little less accurate. So the test came back muscular dystrophy, but they didn't know what type. So since the walking mimicked Duchenne, they went ahead and just did that as the diagnosis. But then my brother Josh started walking that way and they said, "Oh, well, we're not going to test him. We already tested Matt. So he obviously has Duchenne." And then I came along, same thing. So they didn't test me. So everything was based off of this test back in 1977. And by the time-
- Mindy Henderson:** And I'm sorry, I don't mean to interrupt you, but how old were each of you at that point?
- Isaac Banks:** So let's see here. I wasn't born yet and neither was Josh. So Matt was born in 1975, so he was two. Josh was born in 1980. And then I was born in 1984.
- Mindy Henderson:** Gotcha.
- Isaac Banks:** There was a, again, a lot of advancements had happened since Matt's test. And by the time I got to the point to walking funny, that's really the only way to describe it, it was the early '90s. So I was fairly gifted in walking up until that point. I was actually fastest in my class. I loved climbing trees and I didn't really have the signs and symptoms until I was about eight. And then it really started

to kick in and it progressed pretty quick from eight to about 10, I went from being ambulatory to being wheelchair bound.

So I lived, and Matt and Josh as well, up until our teens and early 20s thinking that we had Duchenne muscular dystrophy. And even though I had the disease, I didn't know anything about it. So it wasn't until I was in high school. I was a freshman in high school and I had access for the first time telling on my age to an internet search. They didn't even have Google back then, but I asked, I was like, "Yahoo or GIS or someone, what is Duchenne muscular dystrophy?" And just this wave of emotion started going over me. I started seeing things like life expectancy of 18, some make it to 21 or 22. It was just like this darkness that started piling in around me because I'd never experienced that before. I was always optimistic and just, "Yeah, I had a disability, but whatever, I'm fine. I'm going to live to this ripe old age." And for the first time I thought, "Well, maybe I'm not."

That really started to change my mind set on life. And I really started to turn inward focusing on the fact that I was now looking for ways that I could be happy and not really care about other people. It wasn't intentional, but it was trying to find some fulfillment, trying to get some life out of life before I-

Mindy Henderson: Right.

Isaac Banks: [inaudible 00:07:40]. And after high school, I kind of made it to about 20, 21, and I was still just as active and mobile as I was when I was 16. And my brother Matt and Josh, they were a little less active, but still going strong. And at this point, Matt was almost in his 30s. So the doctors were scratching their head and they said, "We may have made a mistake."

So I called my local MDA office just to talk to them and say, "Hey, is there a chance that I can get retested?" And they said, "Sure. Sure. Come on in." So they did a nerve conduction study test and it came back limb-girdle. Our brains were just blown because we've lived this entire life with this thought of one thing, but it's completely different. And I'm not saying that everyone who has limb-girdle lives to be 90, but there's definitely a different life expectancy from Duchenne to limb-girdle. So for the first time, that weight really started to get lifted of this doom and gloom. I was able to breathe a little heavier and realize, "Oh my goodness, I might actually be able to grab life for the first time and experience life in its fullness." And that's when things really started to turn around for me.

Mindy Henderson: Amazing. I can't imagine that moment and how profound it felt to you. There are so many stories that are similar to yours in the neuromuscular disease community because diagnosis can be such a hard thing to get for a variety of reasons. And there are a lot of people who are misdiagnosed or who, like our 2023 Adult National Ambassador, Amy Sheneman, was on last month and she talked about it taking 40 years to get a diagnosis. I live with SMA and was diagnosed properly. I was fortunate to get the right diagnosis when I was just an infant. And so I can't imagine what that must feel like.

Isaac Banks: Yeah, it's one of those things... Everybody, whether they admit it or not, everyone eventually has that thought of, "How would I respond if I were in the seat? And the doctor came in and said six months to live, two weeks to live?" We see it on TV or movies. And it might just be a fleeting thought, but we all put ourselves in that at least once. And that's kind of what I likened it to. It was like, man, no one is promised tomorrow. None of us.

Mindy Henderson: Right.

Isaac Banks: But some of us are promised that we're not going to be here a month from now. And that is a scary thought. That was the largest hurdle to get across is, okay, how can I still be a benefit to society, to my friends, to my family and take it? Because that's what I did. I just ate all the emotion. I pushed it down, I suppressed it. That was something that really didn't release until a couple of years ago, believe it or not.

So even after getting this great news, I ended up getting married and having three kids, I was living my marriage, and as a dad, just in constant fear of what if today's the day that I go home? Because I knew there wasn't a guarantee and there was good possibility. And my health isn't the greatest, but I'm still really healthy. It directs things. So whenever you come down to that level, when you lower yourself to saying, "Man, I'm going to let this fear suppress me and control me," you cannot have freedom. And that's the thing is what was finally unlocked for my fulfillment in life, was getting free from fear. This cannot be something that controls me, and that is the hardest thing.

It's easy to sit for me and say, "Oh, I did it. I'm free from fear." It is like it's true, but it's not really true. But to someone else, man, what kind of struggle could that be? I watched my aunt get told that she had a month to live because she had brain cancer. Man, what an awful experience that was. And my experience wasn't the same as hers, but it was similar in a way that I understood that, "What next? What am I going to do when I'm gone? What are my kids going to do when I'm gone? How are they going to respond? What if they need me?" And those were the things that really hurt the most and kept me suppressed.

And thankfully, like I said, I found a way to crawl out of that pit and to find meaning. It was largely because of my family, my kids, my faith. All these things build. You can't just have one thing. And that's the thing that I want to tell people the most in any time I'm in a situation or a conversation is, it's more than just one thing. You have to have a life full of appreciation, full of humility in order to really experience the fullness of what we can get out of it.

Mindy Henderson: Absolutely. I could not agree more. So let's talk a little bit about the evolution of your outlook on life. And you walked us through it, but I want to dig in just a little bit more. So you grew up from a very young age with a disability believing that you had one diagnosis, not realizing that it was something different, but, nevertheless. Have you always been a relatively positive person or did you

acquire that over time? Was your family an influence in your outlook on life? How did that all come to be for you?

Isaac Banks:

Well, I wish I could say yes, that I was always positive, but I wasn't. I was a very happy kid until the disability started to progress. I'll tell you, the moment that kicked it off is there's times that you get told things and it just washes over you and you don't pay attention. You know that there's emotion there, but you can't comprehend it. And no one ever actually sat me down and said, "Isaac, you have muscular dystrophy. One day, you're never going to walk again."

I saw my brothers; I saw the way that I walk. I fell a lot. And I just put two and two together, and that was at eight. So I went from an 8-year-old to an adult in a day. And the fact that I had to grow up, I realized that my childhood wasn't going to be like everyone else. And I realized that my life was going to be drastically different and it was going to end up looking like my brothers. And my brothers, man, they're both with the Lord now. But they had such positive and wonderful attitudes.

And I'll get to that here in just a moment on how that shaped me, but I remember one night my oldest brother, Matt, he was just having a rough time. He was, I don't know, maybe 16, 17, and he really just wanted to be a 16-year-old boy. He wanted to go out, he wanted to hang out with his friends. We didn't have a car that he could drive. No driver's license. We're in the country. We can't just go next door and hang out with someone. He was experiencing life with a disability and he was upset. He and my mom were not arguing, but passionately discussing that-

Mindy Henderson:

That's a good way to put it.

Isaac Banks:

... that life is a little bit harder than what he wanted. I remember my dad was sitting... He had a recliner that he always sat in. And I could still walk, I was starting to waddle at that point and fall more. And I remember going over and I sat on the side of my dad's chair. I'm going to try not to cry telling this story. I sat on dad's chair and I leaned into him and he put his arm around me and I just said, "Dad, I don't want to not walk." That's all I could say. And I just cried. My dad just held me. What a selfish thing for me.

Mindy Henderson:

Oh no.

Isaac Banks:

But at the same time, what a wonderful experience that I got to experience with him because again, I don't like putting my burden on other people, but I realized my dad is so supportive of us. Both my parents, you kind of get a little bit of guilt when your kid doesn't turn out perfect, wonderful, 10 toes, 10 fingers, and they're really good at just accepting and saying, "Hey, you're great. You're mine and I'm going to love you no matter what." But I remember that moment of leaning in and just not wanting it and not wanting to own it.

That was the start for me on my mental state of digging that hole down. And my joy left. And as I progressed on, I did a really good job hiding it. I'm not even 40 yet, but I have smile lines because I'm just always smiling. And a lot of it is because I don't want people to know that I'm not actually happy or that I wasn't actually happy. It was easier for me to put on a smile, so that way I was approachable than to actually put on the face that I live in, which it would be sadness and heartache. So that's just why, okay, wake up, put on the smile and go.

I remember I was in 8th grade and I had a helper. His name was Jeremy Ritter. So if Jeremy ever watches this-

Mindy Henderson: Before you jump into this other story, I can't let something that you said go. I have to go back to it, and I want to hear this story from 8th grade next. But you said that it was selfish what you said to your dad about not wanting to not walk. And that doesn't strike me. I mean, I've just got to say, and I'm sure anyone who's listening agrees with me I would guess, but you were an 8-year-old kid processing, almost getting a preview of your future. I don't think that there's anything selfish about a child who's processing their future, and a very real example of their future, in front of them. I think it was actually really great that you were able to articulate that feeling and that fear to your dad. I don't know if you've ever explored it that way, but...

Isaac Banks: Yeah. And again, within all of us, none of us being... And when I say us, I mean the disabled community. I feel like I've earned the right over the years to be able to speak on behalf of certain individuals.

Mindy Henderson: Sure.

Isaac Banks: But we as the disabled community, we never like burdening others with our burden. This is the beauty of my mom and dad on how supportive they are, that something that I felt like, "Oh man, I can't believe I'm making my dad feel bad because I don't want to be disabled and he's my dad." That's the part that was like, "Man, how do I work this out?" And that's that night I grew up because I realized that this whole thing was going to start to escalate and it get worse and worse. And I have to process as an 8-year-old kid, "How am I going to do this?" And it's so hard to be able to find that balance. And like I said, my dad just scooped me up and love me. And that's [inaudible 00:21:16] do.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. And that was a gift that you gave him I think also, was, because like you said, I do think I've talked to some parents who do express that little twinge of guilt, whether right, wrong or indifferent, that they passed something along to their child. And you gave him a gift of being able to take that situation and give you that memory of him just comforting you through it. So I agree with you. I think it's a beautiful moment. I just had to go back to it because I was like, "That is so not selfish." But hearing you explain, I can relate to how we do tend to minimize our own feelings about what we're going through to make other people more comfortable. And I think that that may be another podcast in and

all of itself, because I don't think we should do that. I think a lot of us do, but yeah. So let's move on to you were about to get into talking about 8th grade and a friend of yours.

Isaac Banks:

Yeah. So with that mindset that I had had going up from being an 8-year-old up to 8th grade now, I had become the junior ambassador for MDA for the Tri-State area for Illinois, Missouri and Kentucky. So I was really starting to experience MDA and this organization that really reached out, embraced my family and a community I've never been in, ever. I can get there in a minute about my MDA camp experiences, which were very instrumental in who I am.

It started going to MDA camp, which really it was a release, but I was only allowing it to be a release for me for one week a year, where that one week I was able to just kind of relax and be like, "Okay, I'm the normal one here." And it was a joke that we always had, my friends there, that for one week it was the ambulatory people that were the outcasts, were the weirdos. They're the ones that we stared at. It was like, "Oh my goodness. Look at that counselor using both [inaudible 00:24:00]." And it was a joke, but there was so much truth to it, that when we would go to the shower house, we knew that there wasn't going to be judgment. When we went to the bathroom, we knew that there wasn't going to be judgment. That was the only time out of the year that we really had that, unless we were in the comfort of our own home. Even then we go back to the not wanting to be a burden to our parents or to our caregivers.

So those are things that I was learning about, but my attitude was still, it was starting to turn inward more and more and more. When I was in 8th grade, my helper at school, I was outside doing a PE, physical therapy, and he was rolling me a ball and I was kicking it. Well, the ball got stuck underneath my wheelchair and he reaped down to get it, and I was going to be silly and I was going to kick the ball away, but I ended up kicking his hand pretty hard and it hurt him. And then instead of apologizing, I just laughed because it was funny. It didn't hurt me. He stood up and he spun around and he is like, "Man, you're kind of a jerk, you know that?" And I was just completely blown off. No one had ever said anything like that to me. "If you keep this attitude, you are not going to have friends and you're going to live a lonely life."

Mindy Henderson:

Wow.

Isaac Banks:

And that completely shook me to my core. If I wasn't by him, I would've broke down in tears because he was completely right. I so self-centered at that point that I had no direction on where my life was going because I was just a mad kid. I was putting on that fake smile because that's what we do. But I wasn't doing what I needed to be doing in life. And starting at that moment, that was one of the biggest defining moments from an outside influence that someone really helped me along.

The second one was I had my brother Matt. I thought I could confide in him on complaining I can't. I went to him and I was trying to complain about life and

this and that and being in a wheelchair. I remember he whipped his head around and he was like, "Yeah, shut up." It's like, "Deal with it. Get it on. I mean, pull up your big boy pants and go. You're going to complain and ruin everything. Just deal with it."

Mindy Henderson: Wow.

Isaac Banks: And that was the second thing, that him looking at me and verbatim saying, "Just shut up." And I was like, "Oh. Oh, dang. Jeremy told me I was going to be a jerk if I don't change how I treated people. And Matt told me just to shut up and deal with life, accept it, move on." And those two things are what enabled me to really start to hone my personality. Jeremy realized that I cannot exist in this life without other people. It's just the fact of my existence can only be here because of other people. I can't feed myself. I can't clothe myself. I can't use the bathroom myself. Who's going to want to do that if I'm a punk?

Mindy Henderson: Wow.

Isaac Banks: And that was a big moment for me. And then I also realized, but it can't be fake. It can't be a fake person.

Mindy Henderson: People sniff that out.

Isaac Banks: So fast. It's like that sleazy car salesman thing. I don't want that. I want it to be genuine. And this, I think, is the part where if we're talking about fulfillment, this is the hardest element that I had to learn to do, is to genuinely be thankful. It's not something that happens overnight. It takes time. But if you're able to open up your mind, your heart to what people are sacrificing to help you, then it will start to compile and it'll start to release all of those anxieties and burdens that you have and then you start realizing, oh my goodness, my mom, I might be 39 years old, but at the drop of a hat, if I needed my mom to come help me do something, she would be there, because she's a mom, yes, but also because I'm her baby that has a disability, and that's what she does. I want to be thankful because she loves me and she doesn't have to do that. She could have put us all three of us in a nursing home.

Mindy Henderson: Heaven forbid,

Isaac Banks: Right. Which was a very common thing 60, 70 years ago. But they didn't. They stuck it out and they encouraged us, and that's what I wanted. And then with Matt, just to get over it. And that's what I needed. I needed someone to help push me over the cliff.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. Well, and thank goodness you had people in your life that were willing to be so frank with you and really tell it like it was and give you a couple of little wake up calls to help you. Because I think when it comes to our friends and our family, I think we rely on them to... And it's a reciprocal thing. We rely on each

other to help develop us into the people that we really are truly meant to be and that we can be.

And so I think that what's coming to mind for me is not only you think about these relationships, you talked about the need for having caregivers in your life and things like that and needing people to help you. I think we can always find people who are going to come and do a job, right? But I think that what you are talking about, it's so much bigger than that. And if you can find your way to have an outlook like the one that you've developed over time, it turns that relationship from being sort of a transactional relationship of someone being there to do a job for you to where you are both invested in this relationship and you get what you need out of it and they get something very, very special out of it too, in knowing you and in having a relationship with you and I'm sure being built up by you because of the person that you've become.

And so it ends up, I think, being a much more real, much more special kind of relationship that you're able to curate if you have more of the kind of mindset, I think that you're talking about.

Isaac Banks: Absolutely. And I love the way you said that transactional, because you said that in my mind, I thought, "Well, exactly. If the banking system went down tomorrow and jobs went away and was only doing it for money, what would happen?" But they sacrificed their time to still come help me. That's a very exaggerated example.

Mindy Henderson: For sure.

Isaac Banks: But that's still part... Like, you can kind of understand, the people that are in my life that helped me live my life are there because I do, I have value and years to realize that. And actually, last month I was visiting with some friends for Christmas, and we actually had that conversation because I tend to diminish my value and my worth. I always thought I was doing it in a good way, as in like, "Oh, well, he's being humble." So I always wanted to live humbly. There's a difference between being humble and lowering the quality of who you are as a person.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah, undervaluing yourself. Yeah.

Isaac Banks: So my perceived idea of who I am, I was shortchanging myself. And I had mentioned like, "Well, I just don't have that much to offer." And I was thinking things on the material. "Well, I'm not very wealthy. I can't build you a new table for a Christmas present. So here." And both my friends looked at me and they're like, "We're not friends with you because we want something from you."

Mindy Henderson: Right.

Isaac Banks: "It's because the way you make us feel when we're around you."

Mindy Henderson: Yes, that's it. That's exactly it. Yeah. And I think that that kind of brings us full circle to the topic of fulfillment, because everything that you've been talking about, and like I said, curating this outlook that you have and this way that you are choosing to live your life. And it is a choice, you've made that very clear. And I think so many of us have learned over the course of life that we have a choice to be an angry, grumpy person or a grateful, happy person. And it is a choice, but what all of that comes down to is the circle of people that are to want to be around us. And I think that, again, from a fulfillment perspective, we're social creatures, and the people that we have in our lives I think are so important to fulfillment that we feel or that we don't feel. And it's really who you surround yourself with. And it's going to be much easier to do if you're a happy, joyful person.

Isaac Banks: And it's amazing what you can get away with a smile, like a little kid. My kids can get away with so much just because [inaudible 00:35:05].

Mindy Henderson: Oh, sure,

Isaac Banks: That's the way it is. But whenever that smile is backed by a heart that is genuinely thankful, that's where the fulfillment comes. And my life, I have so much fulfillment in anything I do. Even the things that I can't do well, I'm still doing them and I'm still happy.

One of the things that I tell my kids whenever they ask if we can do something, they'll be like, "Hey, dad, can we play catch?" I'm like, "Well, no, not like [inaudible 00:35:42] catch, but we can do it our way." We would find a way to do it and then find joy and fulfillment in it. My kids don't care whether I'm throwing the ball or rolling it or if I'm using my foot peg or my tire on my wheelchair, they don't care. It's not the playing ball, it's the spending time with me. And that's what's important, and that's where the fulfillment comes.

When I'm with my adult friends, it's not whether we're fishing or hunting or doing any out on the court playing basketball. It's the conversations and is what I'm telling them, building them up and letting them experience encouragement, which is something we all need or something that's going to bring them down and be like, "Man, I got to go hang out with Isaac. But he's such a downer all the time." And it's amazing how quickly you can inspire someone without even... And I was voted prom king in high school. It just completely blew me away. They called my name and it was like the teacher on peanuts or something like.... Everyone was cheering and looking at me, and I was like, "What?" And then someone next to me leaned over was like, "You're the prom king."

Mindy Henderson: I love it.

Isaac Banks: Yeah, it was awesome. And then afterwards, as my classmates were coming up talking to me and being like, "Man, since 4th grade, which is when I started public school, you were so inspiring and you were always so kind to me." And

here's the thing, they still saw, even though I thought that I was awful and I did treat certain people bad like Jeremy [inaudible 00:37:42], I had that smile the whole time. I was doing nice things, but I was just a bad person. So I felt great and guilty at the same time because in my younger years, "Well, I wish you knew a better version of me." But as I got older, it got better because that weight lifted, like I said, realizing, "Oh, I need to do better because of what Matt and Jeremy said." But then I also had that internet search experience of that darkness. And that darkness is different than the anger that I had.

So when I was young, I was angry. Older, I got scared. And that scary feeling is what drove me to want to be around people because I didn't want to be alone, because I didn't want to be alone. Those are things that really fed into that. And when people started coming up to me saying, "Man, you're such an inspiration." I'm like, "For what? I didn't do anything." And they're like, "But that's where you're wrong. You did. You treated me with respect. You were kind to me. You encouraged me. When I saw you out on the field in marching band, that was amazing to watch you do that. Or when I went to the theater and saw you acting in that play, you were out there doing it. That's an inspiring thing."

And I never put two and two together that me just existing as a disabled person automatically is either going to inspire someone to do better or inspire them to leave you alone. Those are your only two options.

Mindy Henderson: Interesting.

Isaac Banks: I was blessed enough to be able to fall into the inspire people to do better. And 20 years after high school, I'll still meet a friend and be like... Well, I just have my 20-year reunion for high school and some kids hugged me and was like, "We didn't think you were going to be here." That came after high school. And they're just like, "Man, we're so thankful you're here. We can't imagine life without you." And wonderful testimony to get and to receive that and to know that they mean it. They didn't have to say that.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah. Well, I mean, I'm thinking a few different things simultaneously as you're talking. I think that my first thought is that at any moment in our lives, all of us could be better versions of ourselves. There's always something to work on and we can always improve. And to your credit, you did that through the course of your life, and you had a couple of friends who gave you these wake up calls and helped you along with that a little bit. But I think that as a result, even though I hear you saying that you were a bad person, which I don't think probably you were, I think that the kids that you went to school with and that voted you prom king, they saw through, I think, some of what you were maybe acting out then, but we're not destined to be, if that makes any sense. And they saw, I think, through the smiles and the respect that you gave people and the kindness that you showed people, I think they saw who you really truly were, if that makes any sense.

Isaac Banks:

Yeah, absolutely. And it's funny, because I have been caught and things like that. I had a friend that thought that he was going to be diagnosed with MS and he came into school one time, and he pulled me aside. I just come through the doors, he pulled me aside and said, "The doctors think I might have MS" and he's like, "I know that you're smiling, but you're not really smiling. How do I deal with this?" And I was like, "Oh, he caught me." So there have been instances where people do see that.

And I think there's a certain level of respect. I kind of liken it when you know someone is in pain and you come into the room and they smile anyway at you when they could be frowning. You still know they're in pain, but you so much appreciate that they're taking the time to try to make you feel better while they are suffering. I think you're very right on that. I think they were able to be around me enough to know who I wanted to be as a person, who I was trying to be as a person, and that I genuinely cared about them, and they knew that I was having a hard time. They knew I was having a hard time, and they were still so supportive. And that's part of that circle that we were talking about earlier. You cannot surround yourself with people that won't allow you to grow.

Mindy Henderson:

Yes. Oh my gosh. So, so true. And you're absolutely right. And that leads me to something else that I wanted to bring up as a result of all of the things that you've been saying, is that we've talked a lot about caregivers and people like that and the people that we want in our lives. And we want to treat people a certain way and be a certain type of human to attract those people. But I also just... I can't not say it, that we deserve the same. It's so important in the whole realm of fulfillment and joy in our lives and living a good life that we only keep the people in our lives that treat us the same way, that are kind to us, that are respectful, that help us grow, like you said, but in a loving, caring way. And anyone that isn't capable of those things, of that kindness and respect, I recommend that people say goodbye to.

Isaac Banks:

Yeah, absolutely. And it's easy actually. What's wonderful is the better you treat yourself, the better you're going to treat others that don't like the way that you are will naturally step back. It makes them uncomfortable, it'll convict them, and they will naturally step away. And it's no longer on you. So your friends that aren't encouraging, that are keeping you down, that are maybe they're just fine living this mediocre life, all you have to do is just start trying. And they'll hold their hands up and it's like, "No [inaudible 00:45:14]."

Mindy Henderson:

Well, they'll either rise to the occasion and maybe you can do for them what your friends did for you, or they'll go some other direction and figure it out for themselves.

So we've only got just a few minutes left. This is such fun for me to talk to you about these things. You have found over the course of your life... And it's a journey, right? We think that we're fulfilled and then something else comes along and we're even more fulfilled. And so meaning and fulfillment I think can come along at any time. But when someone maybe hasn't had the people in

their life that you had the good fortune to have, who could give them some wake up calls, who could point them in some directions and show them some different things, and maybe these people haven't really identified what the true meaning of their life is, what's meaningful in their own life or hasn't identified a passion or something to really light them up or help spark that joy, what would your advice be to those people?

Isaac Banks: So this is actually a really fun question. I started a podcast with a friend of mine a couple years ago.

Mindy Henderson: What's it called?

Isaac Banks: It's called Man Versus Wheelchair.

Mindy Henderson: Oh, nice.

Isaac Banks: One of the things that we talked about was it was seven advantages that a disabled person has over an ambulatory person. And I talk about that, and it was a little PDF. I'll share it with you [inaudible 00:47:12] listeners as well. But one of them is finding your voice. So our voice is not just what we're speaking, it's how we're speaking, right? It's, are you using your voice to build up others? Are you using your voice to belittle others? Talents, your time, your hope, these are part of the seven elements of being disabled that we are actually blessed to be able to hone because of our disability. And when dealing with learning how to do that, you have to start at one spot. None of this is overnight success, right? I'm not who I am today because at 8, my dad gave me a hug.

Mindy Henderson: Right. Right.

Isaac Banks: [inaudible 00:48:03] tears, many tears and heartache to get where I'm at. But you have to start somewhere. I'm a bold person, so I don't mind saying like my thing that I started with was my faith. And whether you have faith or you don't, you need to find something that you can pour into that's greater than yourself. That is the most important thing that you can give into that you don't receive back. You have to pour into something. And that's the thing that's going to be hard. And finding that, what is it that's going to allow you to open up your heart, because all these things are heart issues. It's not your mind. Your mind gets in the way. It's all part of your heart. If you want to be a better person, you start with your heart.

So I would say for the person that doesn't quite know, start trying things out. I started out writing when I was a kid. I did music as a kid. Oh goodness. What all did I do? I played around with public speaking. Those are things that I was able to do, but maybe someone can't. Maybe they're like my brothers who really couldn't get out of their house. If you have a smartphone or a computer, you can start reaching out. Facebook groups are huge. There's so many community

Facebook groups with disabilities. It's just starting to get connections, getting those connections and finding something that you can connect with.

I think that it's hard to condense my life down into one little thing.

Mindy Henderson: Of course.

Isaac Banks: [inaudible 00:49:54] yours, but if we kind of backtrack, I think the most important thing is you have to start deciding. The first step is deciding, "Am I going to do it or not? Am I going to stick with this? Am I going to find something?" Because then your mind just starts going crazy. I'm an author, I love writing. So that helped me to start experiencing being able to use my voice, that if you have a computer, a smartphone, I use Siri. Text is [inaudible 00:50:34]. Start a blog. If you like to speak, you have a microphone on your phone, start a podcast. These are all things that you can start to do. There's no one answer, which is what I love because everyone is unique. But don't be afraid to experience failure, experience reaching out. And if you're not in a community that's supportive, that's where I would start with the digital community. If I don't have parents that are as supportive, okay, reach out to you, reach out to me, or reach out to MDA. We're here to help and to start those connections.

Mindy Henderson: Yes.

Isaac Banks: And that's what I think is most important.

Mindy Henderson: Yeah, I mean, such good points. And those are some brilliant examples of things, just a variety of things that people can try. And your point is so well-made. I think it's a question of just trying things out.

I had a mentor who used to tell me that anytime you start something new or try something new, and this is my podcast so I can say this, you're going to suck. You have to suck before you can get better at something. And so I have friends and people I know who get frustrated if they're not good at something right off the bat. But it takes time. And I would say if you love something, if you can't stop reading about something, if you can't stop talking about something, those in my opinion are signs that that could be your passion, that could be your meaning in life. So follow those paper trails and breadcrumbs as well.

So I hate to say it, we are actually out of time, but this has been so much fun to talk to you. I will throw out there also, because you mentioned connections again, and it goes back to the social. I think social connections are so important. MDA actually has a Connections program. You can call the resource center and get plugged into our Connections program to find other people in our community that are like-minded and maybe enjoy some of the same things that you do. And that can be a great way as well to make some new connections in

your life. But Isaac, it's been such a pleasure talking to you. I can't thank you enough for being here.

Isaac Banks:

Well, thank you so much. Like I said, this was such a blessing. Anytime I get to speak with people that are excited about life and betterment, that's what I want to do. And I just thank you so much for allowing me this honor today.

Mindy Henderson:

Oh, my pleasure. Thank you so much.

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