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Oral History Conversation with Stepheni Norton

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[Alaina:] First of all, we want to welcome you to USD.

Miss Stepheni Norton-- founder and owner of Dickinson Farm.

And want to thank you for having this conversation with us.

[Stepheni:] Thank you.

[Alaina:] First, we would like to ask: Can you take us back to what your childhood was like. Was there any specific childhood experiences that you might have been able to connect to the kind of work you're doing in Dickinson Farms.

---sources of inspiration, motives, seeds
of specific ideas

00:00:34.280 --> 00:00:36.400
or important relationships?

00:00:36.450 --> 00:00:42.400
[Stepheni:] I grew up here in California--Orange County. I went to

00:00:42.400 --> 00:00:44.750
a private school like military school

00:00:44.750 --> 00:00:46.450
a majority of my life until the eighth grade,

00:00:46.450 --> 00:00:48.960
so my family was military.

00:00:48.960 --> 00:00:50.560
And then my mom was

00:00:50.580 --> 00:00:57.080
a child advocate. So there was--
She was always the person that she would joke and say

00:00:57.080 --> 00:00:57.940
Um,

00:00:57.940 --> 00:01:01.330
Everybody, was like, had something to offer. And I’d say,

00:01:01.330 --> 00:01:03.160
"Well, what if they were an axe murderer, mom?"

00:01:03.160 --> 00:01:05.400
And she’s like,
"We'll feed dinner without knives."
It'll be fine."

(Laughing)

So, she was just always that there was something special in everybody.

And, I can tell you, growing up like sometimes that was really, like, great and other times it wasn't; as you're a kid and you're trying to figure out, kind of, how your parents are--

how their belief systems are founded.

But that probably was the-- I know that was the main thing that kind of stuck with me continuously in everything I've done-- is that you can maybe not always see the silver lining but you can see the value in everybody and everything they do and how it contributes
to, kind of, the greater good.

00:01:42.950 --> 00:01:46.840
[Alaina:] During the two and a half years of uncertainty of what kind of business

00:01:46.840 --> 00:01:49.250
you had had,
could you guide us

00:01:49.250 --> 00:01:51.740
to what you were feeling, what you were going through in your head?

00:01:51.740 --> 00:01:56.380
How did you overcome such uncertainty and remain hopeful through the process?

00:01:56.390 --> 00:02:00.520
And do you use this experience as a teaching tool in your current venture?

00:02:00.540 --> 00:02:04.880
And, if so, can you provide an example that illustrates overcoming uncertainty?

00:02:04.890 --> 00:02:10.329
[Stephani:] Sure. So I actually, um, I got sick. We found out later I got bit

00:02:10.329 --> 00:02:12.470
during pre-deployment workouts.
So it was a, it was

00:02:12.480 --> 00:02:18.440
a pretty intense op tempo. My symptoms started within about three days so we were

00:02:18.450 --> 00:02:23.840
still preparing, at that point we were
preparing to go to Kuwait. And we were going, going, going--

like sixteen eighteen hour days. Through that whole time I knew something was wrong there were some days that I couldn’t walk so I knew that there was something really major wrong that wasn’t, um-- as the military told me was like, "Well, you just got engaged so maybe, it's like, you're going to be fearful because you're going to be gone and I was like, "No, pretty sure that's not it." So through the whole thing it was like in the beginning it was, "Oh, I'm sure this is just the flu." Like it's something just really minor and that as things continued and when the military was like, "Girl, you got a plane to catch"
so, like, you better figure
out whatever is going on with you."

Then it became

more into this like, "Okay, I'm going
to be gone for, you know, ten months to

a year and alone." I mean with your-- you
know, but basically alone. And then as I

started to get sicker, unemployment, it
really kind of hit me that regardless of

being like surrounded by people you can
be completely alone when you don't know

what's wrong, nobody knows what's
wrong. For me I went through bouts of

During it was confusion, maybe I
am crazy, maybe it is just-- you

know, I haven't been engaged and have my
fiance. Like maybe they're right. I got

advanced very quickly in the military.
I went from a second class to

a chief. So like from
an enlisted member to 

00:03:49.770 --&gt; 00:03:51.410
a senior enlisted leader in less than 

00:03:51.420 --&gt; 00:03:58.080
a year. So that on top of it, made it like 
well maybe this is true. Maybe it just is 

00:03:58.090 --&gt; 00:04:02.110
because it's so quick and it's kind of 
everything happening. As I continue to get 

00:04:02.120 --&gt; 00:04:06.810
more sick and, you know, I’d wake 
up coughing up blood and we found 

00:04:06.820 --&gt; 00:04:12.480
I had scar tissue. And kind of all these 
more major life changing things. Anger kind of 

00:04:12.490 --&gt; 00:04:14.890
set in, so I spent 

00:04:14.930 --&gt; 00:04:20.670
a lot of time during kind of halfway 
through from the time I got bit 

00:04:20.670 --&gt; 00:04:24.490
to before I got diagnosed. Which was 
probably like eighteen months to two years 

00:04:24.490 --&gt; 00:04:27.490
of just intense anger 

00:04:27.490 --&gt; 00:04:32.930
Anger that, as I would tell my husband 
like, "I did the King's work, right?" 

00:04:32.940 --&gt; 00:04:37.450
Like I deployed, I did everything that I was supposed to do. I stopped my life.

And, like, nobody cares that I’m sick. And nobody cares what’s going on with me. So there was a ton of anger when I came back from deployment. I would say I was angry and then that kind of toyed with suicidal like back and forth continuously. And it took us about another year after I got back before we got diagnosed and again bouncing around. Military medical is really really good for bullet wounds. You know they like pack your bullet wound, they break-- they like fix your broken leg and then they send you back out. For illnesses their, their attitude is like, "Well, well...we’re not really sure."

--Yeah. So, in their defense they
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00:05:19.830 --> 00:05:21.080
don't know how to treat it.

00:05:21.080 --> 00:05:25.720
They don't know what to do. But it didn't, it didn't-- in the moment, it didn't feel

00:05:25.730 --> 00:05:27.710
like that. It felt very much like ignoring

00:05:27.720 --> 00:05:33.490
a problem or saying, you know, refusing to deal with it. When we got the diagnosis,

00:05:36.400 --> 00:05:40.550
It was probably one of the most amazing days because it was something. It was

00:05:40.560 --> 00:05:43.480
like tangible.-- Yeah. My doctor is

00:05:44.110 --> 00:05:48.890
a stoic Russian so he just like comes in. You know, like, everybody else would be

00:05:48.890 --> 00:05:53.370
like, "Mmm, maybe just made that way." I'm like, "Yeah! Maybe like it's perfectly

00:05:53.370 --> 00:05:57.320
fine that my leg doesn't move." Like, I could see how all the sudden that would

00:05:57.320 --> 00:05:59.340
be right. So my doctor

00:05:59.340 --> 00:06:02.600
came in, and he laid open my medical record and he was like,
"This is what this test is,
and as you can see, you're positive. And in remission we would consider alive at the activity rate of late two hundred in Europe twenty seven thousand so you're kind of a Petri dish.
[Alaina:] So during that time was it, like building up that it--
Yeah, basically--Lyme, if you get it within it-- if I would have gotten antibiotics right when I got bit, which the corpsman that was with me, knew I got bit and reported it if they were to give me antibiotics right then, it would have been two to four weeks.
And then it would just kill the--it's
bacterial infection. Failing to act means it settles in your bones, in your tissues.

So I'll have it the rest of my life. So my doctors' thing was like we can get this to go into remission we can't fix it it's never going to go away we can get it to go into remission but it's kind of like really stuck before it gets better. So that that I would say was kind of the beginning of being able to see a light. To be like, "Okay there's somebody that cares about me and cares about helping me."

And then that coupled with, you know, we did treatment for-- I say "we" because my husband had duty at night and he would like to take me every day and sleep in a chair next to me and then take me home. Yeah he definitely was like-- and this was
we did the blood work a week before we got married, and we got the diagnosis

a week after. So I was like, "In sickness and in health, babe! That's what it is, right?"

Yeah, exactly I was like, "Hmm, I got it on video." But he was like

a huge trooper and just really supportive. The first day we started treatment,

He said to me he's like, he took my hands and he put him them on my lap.

And he was like,

"It's going to suck and it's going to hurt and you're going to get stuck every single day."

and I want you to know" -- And I'll get upset-- "I want you to know that the people that

are in this room are the only people that care if you live or die. All the people

you deployed with, all the people you reported to, didn't give
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a $h!T if you lived or died. And these people
do. So on your worst day, you just smile

00:08:05.180 --> 00:08:09.500
and nod your head and they’ll know and
on your best day like you just give them

00:08:09.510 --> 00:08:12.160
all love back because they’re the only
people are going to make you not be in

00:08:12.170 --> 00:08:18.400
a wheelchair the rest of your life." And we did,
and that everything that the doctor told us to do

00:08:18.410 --> 00:08:23.540
and told me to do I did. And we found out
fairly quickly that National City is

00:08:23.550 --> 00:08:27.740
a food desert. We had bought the house right
before I deployed as our kind of last

00:08:27.750 --> 00:08:30.540
move and forever house.
And National City has like

00:08:30.550 --> 00:08:33.100
convenience stores which
doesn’t seem like it’s

00:08:33.110 --> 00:08:36.300
a big deal until you’re
spending seven hours a day in

00:08:36.300 --> 00:08:40.669
a treatment chair you’re nacious coming home
you can’t stop anywhere your husband has

00:08:40.679 --> 00:08:46.730
to get to duty it's like all these things.
And yea you think there'd be something

besides like seven eleven but now there's

a couple more near us but they're actually
not within our city limits and yeah so

we found out that he couldn't cook either
so. If he was just like I don't know what
to do and we got like we
got a personal chef for

a while and we really were military family
and like we're not going to be able to

afford this. So I am pretty type A and I
walked into my doctor's office I was like

I'm going to grow my own food like how hard can
it be right. Cause it's seeds and dirt and it

has to be like super easy. And my doctor
like, was very stoic that day and just

nodded and pat my husband on the shoulder and
said "Don't let her kill herself, keep her out of
the sun". And we did and they built me
raised beds and I started that way and

00:09:36.560 --> 00:09:41.050
about halfway through our second season
the military decided that my two year

00:09:41.060 --> 00:09:47.190
treatment protocol wasn’t getting done in
one year so medical retirement was the

00:09:47.200 --> 00:09:53.790
best choice and so they medically retired
me and then it was kind of all back to

00:09:53.800 --> 00:10:00.400
that anger and everything. [ Alaina: You wanted to go back?]
[ Stepheni: It was my like, I had, even though I was sick I

00:10:00.410 --> 00:10:04.780
had like my next three deployments planned
out like I was going to go help shut

00:10:04.790 --> 00:10:10.180
down the Afghanistan bases and bring all
the equipment home like I knew what my

00:10:10.190 --> 00:10:15.980
plan was and even sick I mean
it’s crazy in hindsight to be like no

00:10:15.990 --> 00:10:20.850
I’m just going to transfer that unit and
it’ll be fine I’ll feel better. But yea I

00:10:20.860 --> 00:10:26.260
already had it planned out so I didn’t and
I was a reservist that went so I was

00:10:26.270 --> 00:10:32.490
a reservist that joined late in life I
was in my thirty's and when I joined

I had been volunteering

a lot for the Coast Guard just as there were different events and they

were put on for families that I would help them with. And I had this commander at the time that said like you're young enough like you should join,

you should get paid for this. I kept going no, no, no it's fine I'll just volunteer and she's like no just join the reserves it's

one weekend a month

but then every time you volunteer like you can get paid for that too.

I was like hmm, I don't know. They convinced me to join I go to boot camp I come back I check in my unit I

go to London for my civilian job, I came back turned on my phone and they're like you're deploying I was like I haven't even been
to A school I don't even know what you're talking about right now and they're like no

00:11:15.150 --> 00:11:17.830
it's not a joke and literally probably ten minutes, I'm like no it's

00:11:17.840 --> 00:11:21.820
a joke they're like shut up, pack your stuff, you're deploying and I left for ten

00:11:21.830 --> 00:11:25.000
months the first time I came back drilled as

00:11:25.010 --> 00:11:28.490
a reservist really two months and then they called me and said, "You're doing the

00:11:28.500 --> 00:11:33.380
critical fill and you're propping for Kuwait.

So from the time I joined I was only

00:11:33.390 --> 00:11:35.230
a real reservist like

00:11:35.240 --> 00:11:38.840
a normal reservist for like two to three months so the whole time I was in, I was active

00:11:38.850 --> 00:11:44.390
duty which is hard because when you try to go back to your civilian job and you've

00:11:44.400 --> 00:11:49.990
been active duty that long there's no direct transition back. My civilian job was

00:11:50.000 --> 00:11:53.390
regulatory compliance and in the period
I was gone there was over three hundred

changes to the regulations, you can't catch back up right

right right and then. Your civilian job is like required to give you time to train

but they're like, there's no way we can get you back up this quick. So for me it was

like I don't even know what I'm supposed to do, like I can't really go back to that.

I intended to have

a couple more deployments so that was that plan. And then it really was like well

the foods are growing well. We'll see how that goes.

[Evan: Do you feel that your long years of experience in the military has greatly helped you go about your day to day managing responsibilities with Dickinson Farms.

Um I wouldn't say yes, but every time I talk to people they're like really, like everything how everything is. It kind of goes back to that
mission focus like we have a goal
all that every season we have a goal

00:12:52.770 --> 00:12:55.350
every week we have
a goal, and every day we have a goal.

00:12:55.350 --> 00:12:59.600
and that's very much aligned
with how you move a unit to go through

00:12:59.640 --> 00:13:01.850
a deployment and kind
of come home safely from

00:13:01.860 --> 00:13:06.550
a mission so I wouldn't have thought so but
it's kind of ingrained in you that you

00:13:06.560 --> 00:13:11.600
work that you kind of work that way right
right right and people either love it or hate it.

00:13:11.610 --> 00:13:14.350
Thankfully our employee loves it so it's fine

00:13:17.520 --> 00:13:24.260
[Evan: With no farming experience at all, you must have been a little unsure starting your own personal
organic farm.

00:13:25.210 --> 00:13:30.230
Because you already had an entrepreneurial
spirit, how did you feel about taking this on,

00:13:30.630 --> 00:13:34.430
and was there anyone you and your husband went to for
guidance when you first started farming?

00:13:34.500 --> 00:13:39.520
Because we started growing for us, it wasn't that. We've
started businesses before,

00:13:39.590 --> 00:13:44.600
I've started businesses before, before I even met my husband. and they usually start very traditionally with

00:13:44.610 --> 00:13:48.730
a business plan and you know evaluating the market. This was very much started for us

00:13:48.770 --> 00:13:54.250
for me specifically to have access to food so when we made the transition from kind

00:13:54.260 --> 00:14:01.150
of private gardening into commercial farming. For us it was the private

00:14:01.160 --> 00:14:04.510
garden was like easy or like what happened like worst case is the wind comes in, which

00:14:04.510 --> 00:14:08.480
Which it did and kills plants and that's kind of freaky because you see like frostbite in

00:14:08.490 --> 00:14:15.040
plants which is weird. But it wasn't there wasn't like this big business

00:14:15.050 --> 00:14:19.830
heavy weight kind of emotional commitment to this because it was like well this is food for me.

00:14:19.860 --> 00:14:26.680
When we made the transition, I was still in treatment so I took all the time I was sitting

00:14:26.940 --> 00:14:30.830
a treatment chair and just started planning out and researching as much as I could
so we went with my treatment protocol was
four to six weeks on and then two weeks
off so your liver and kidneys can refresh.
Kind of recover from that med we would
take that time to go to either Web in ars or drive to Phoenix and take an
agriculture class or there was
a class here we would take it so it was
more or less traditional kind of business
planning perspective and more like we're
in this. My husband's
attitude was it makes you emotionally
happier so even if it doesn't become
a business I think it's something that
you need to do, while we're going through treatment
because gardening like, being
out there and like going from
a perspective of being told that if I
did nothing I would die and it would be
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a painful death and it wouldn’t you
don’t just die from Lyme like your body

00:15:19.850 --> 00:15:25.240
basically rejects everything and then you
die so yeah it’s a really awful it’s

00:15:25.250 --> 00:15:31.800
a really awful way to go. So knowing that
I had to take treatment and with Lyme to

00:15:31.810 --> 00:15:37.230
you can’t sit too long or stand you can’t
not move too long so it’s like when

00:15:37.240 --> 00:15:42.060
you sleep, I can everybody’s
different I can sleep eight, ten hours maybe

00:15:42.400 --> 00:15:46.280
anything longer than that you can’t walk,
like you can’t get up to move your body

00:15:46.290 --> 00:15:51.670
kind of freezes up so being outside and
being gardening as long as that was out of

00:15:51.680 --> 00:15:57.130
the direct sun. That’s amazing on your body, your body
moves really well it kind of fights back

00:15:57.140 --> 00:16:01.280
the deterioration that’s happening from Lyme, so we knew that regardless that’s

00:16:01.290 --> 00:16:04.790
what we were going to do or that’s what I
was going to do through Lyme treatment just to

00:16:04.800 --> 00:16:10.500
make myself feel better. And
then when we decided to make it

00:16:10.510 --> 00:16:17.290
a business you really saw that that was
an opportunity. Scary but not as scary as

00:16:17.300 --> 00:16:20.120
everything else we've been through that
kind of seemed like the easy part.

00:16:20.130 --> 00:16:24.470
[Evan: Was there a certain point when you were like, wow we should really make this into a business?

00:16:24.480 --> 00:16:30.610
[Stepheni: It was it was really the kind of alignment of being medically retired

00:16:30.610 --> 00:16:33.880
and then looking at it that we had so much excess

00:16:33.880 --> 00:16:38.960
in a very small area cause we weren't even growing the
whole quarter acre yet and we are giving

00:16:38.970 --> 00:16:43.130
it away and we are donating it and more and
more people are like "Oh here let me pay you".

00:16:43.140 --> 00:16:48.190
I was like We can't take your money that's illegal.
So then it then yeah then it was like

00:16:48.250 --> 00:16:53.560
Hmm, we need to look at this yeah so it really
was kind of looking at that and saying

00:16:53.910 --> 00:16:57.650
well if I'm here there has to be
other people like me and they want access

00:16:57.660 --> 00:17:02.890
to food so it was kind of kind of the
stars aligned and put us on that path and

00:17:03.260 --> 00:17:06.359
really quite honestly the worst thing you
do is pay for seeds and then figure out

00:17:06.369 --> 00:17:10.520
nobody wants it you just don’t grow them the next season. So I’m not saying.

00:17:10.530 --> 00:17:13.700
I’m playing it off like it’s super easy it’s not that easy
but it is really like when you look at

00:17:13.710 --> 00:17:14.359
it we’re not building

00:17:14.369 --> 00:17:17.460
a building or you know building
an app or something that takes

00:17:17.500 --> 00:17:19.359
a lot of money and time it takes

00:17:19.400 --> 00:17:23.060
a season and if it didn’t work out
we would have just stopped growing.

00:17:27.170 --> 00:17:33.640
[Rola: So what personal values has been most influential, in driving you to pursue your business venture,

00:17:33.650 --> 00:17:37.810
and have any of these values changed since you’ve started Dickinson Farms

00:17:37.860 --> 00:17:42.090
[Stepheni: I believe really strongly that you give of your strengths freely

00:17:42.090 --> 00:17:45.810
and you admit your weaknesses really really quickly.]
And that’s with anything so for me my background was regulatory compliance,

project management, software movementation like that was really my focus.

And they happened to be in biotech and government relations but those two things helped me significantly when we had to go down to get our permitting and all that stuff because I knew how to read the municipal code I knew how to follow the law I knew about where to go to get the law to be able to make sure we were in compliance

But the things I didn’t know were growing so we, we really looked at it inside my my husband once we figured out like this is going to be

a business he’s like ok the business plan has to include an employee it can be a part time employee but it has to because for him to feel comfortable.
That I could be working on this business and if

a day I couldn't walk or if I fell that I wasn't like alone outside until somebody came home so to me that kind of give of your strengths was very much like I can feasibly teach a person the business of farming which oddly enough is not in any school or like a thing that's kind of thought of it's labor Oh your It's altruistic it's constantly which is fine except at some point you have to make money to keep the farm going so I can teach somebody the business I can teach somebody project management, logistics management I mean I’ve moved units all over the world.

And put software in place to make that easier for all of us what I needed help with is physical lifting for the days that I can't do it and knowledge on growing so being
having a value that I would tell people like hey
this is all I bring to the table in the

business and like now I need a farm hand
that can teach me as we go to make me

a better farmer and I'll make you

a better business person, project manager,
manager those type of things so it's and I

mean it still today yeah.

[Rola: So your website states that you give the excess food that you grow
to an organization named dreams for change

Although this is a very noble act have you ever considered
donating any profits that you made to the American Lyme Disease foundation

or similar groups in order to spread awareness to people about the first

stages of Lyme Disease and do you think there is a

need for more doctors in California who are more literate and in terms of Lyme Disease?
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00:20:06.980 --> 00:20:13.310
[Stepheni: Is there a need for more doctors in California and everywhere, absolutely. The we never knew

00:20:13.320 --> 00:20:18.580
that Lyme was, an unbelievable illness for lack of

00:20:18.590 --> 00:20:21.760
a better word like it's kind
of phantom illness that that

00:20:21.770 --> 00:20:25.210
a lot of doctors if they're not especially
if they're from California or places

00:20:25.220 --> 00:20:30.040
where California has Lyme disease but most
people don't realize it does. Yeah yeah

00:20:30.040 --> 00:20:36.240
We have a ton of ticks here, there are actually six hundred tick born illnesses

00:20:36.370 --> 00:20:41.980
when you get bit by a tick here, they're just like meh, we'll
just pay attention, eh no

00:20:41.990 --> 00:20:48.920
So absolutely more need for doctors. Related
to donating to somebody, like lyme awareness the unfortunate

00:20:48.930 --> 00:20:54.480
part right now is that it still is really
considered this like the difference between the CDC

00:20:54.510 --> 00:21:00.350
and the insurance systems and civilian
doctors we've had people that have literally

00:21:00.360 --> 00:21:07.250
said to my face it was Earth's karma
that I had Lyme and I was like so

based on my life practice which is I'm not certainly like zero waste but you know

like I don't destroy the earth and I don't pour oil on the ground. Yeah like of everything

that I've done in my life, do I think that the Earth would come after me hmm ok

but exactly but it was so interesting because everybody has

a different belief in it and it's ultimately it's the same as syphilis it's

a very similar spiral key it's

a bacterial infection, and is cured by antibiotics and it's just how quickly that you get them

so the lyme a lot of the Lyme associations are fighting that battle which is

a noble battle but we would rather in our donations and kind of as a family we choose this to make direct an instantaneous impact so that's a

long term impact which needs
to be there but I think there's

00:22:01.120 --&gt; 00:22:06.430
a lot of direct impact and today impacts
that get missed in donating

00:22:06.940 --&gt; 00:22:12.310
like I want to know that if you’re hungry I can feed you and that’s going to make you

00:22:13.000 --&gt; 00:22:16.220
be a stronger person and you’re going to get back to our community just by the nature

00:22:16.230 --&gt; 00:22:23.210
of doing that and to me that impact is
greater than getting people to believe you

00:22:23.220 --&gt; 00:22:27.560
know that the world isn’t flat anymore like those type of things I’d rather not

00:22:27.600 --&gt; 00:22:31.960
take money and put it there I’d rather make
somebody feel their belly and smile and

00:22:31.970 --&gt; 00:22:35.500
know that the world is an ok place and people care about them

00:22:35.500 --&gt; 00:22:38.370
and to me that seems a little more important.

00:22:38.990 --&gt; 00:22:40.930
Alaina: which kind of goes back to your mom’s

00:22:40.930 --&gt; 00:22:43.930
Stephani: yeah yeah everyday

NOTE Paragraph

00:22:43.930 --&gt; 00:22:45.480
everyday man and i can tell you as
Oral History Conversation with Stepheni Norton

00:22:45.490 --> 00:22:50.970
a kid it drove me nuts but now I'm just
like yeah like yeah you're right you're

00:22:50.980 --> 00:22:57.060
Rola: they're always right
Stepheni: right they are damn them. So.

00:22:58.120 --> 00:23:04.620
Rola: You have endured very many different lifestyles and excelled in all of them
even being named Lead Yeoman of the Year and being selected as the

00:23:04.630 --> 00:23:07.390
Reserve Enlisted Person of the Year. Which
accomplishment,

00:23:07.390 --> 00:23:10.390
including founding Dickinson Farm, do you feel has impacted the

00:23:10.390 --> 00:23:16.840
way you live most?
Stepheni: It's not an accomplishment,
but quite honestly it's Lyme.

00:23:18.300 --> 00:23:25.180
I wouldn't have. I hate
everything about it I hate

00:23:25.190 --> 00:23:30.830
that it changes everything about you
know. I might as well have early onset

00:23:30.840 --> 00:23:34.220
Alzheimer's I mean like your
brain when I said do you like I'm

00:23:34.230 --> 00:23:40.190
a little turned around yeah it is it destroys
your brain it destroys every bone
in your body and every muscle destroys your heart. But without that

catalysts I would have been, my husband and I, when we met we were very are we are

both are in very kind of powerful career paths not with the company we, he was with

the government I was owning I owned companies and kind of went around the world I

traveled about three hundred sixty the year and my husband ran in places all over

the world which is kind of cool but it's also that means in thirteen years we had

two years counted total in months not to your straight but we were in the same location so if it wasn't for Lyme I wouldn't have

stopped to see that my community is around me every day that they're that there's

people here that need just as much help and support and. Love and
endurance all that stuff that when you’re in the military were you when you’re doing

a job or why you kind of always focus on what’s out there so I think that. That’s certainly not an accomplishment I would tell somebody go out and get themselves Lyme. But I think that it’s definitely what has got me to this exact moment and even on the days I can’t walk I really like this exact moment so I’ll take it.

Mitch: I saw on your website that he so Farmacy boxes that match diabetic, anti inflammatory diet, Lyme diets with other various diseases, are these options the market you want to sell to more as opposed to farm markets or onsite or is that like another way of giving back to people you that you’d like fresh produce to get healthier?

Stepheni: so when we first started our business plan was to sell within a mile of our farm
a mile of our farm that we didn't want to transfer the produce we didn't want to have it be cut early and shipped all over and we actually got an offer by Amazon before we even opened our doors to buy a hundred percent of our food every day. And we walked away from it I didn't want these tomatoes that you know I was spending all this care and feeding and love with to go to someplace on the Eastcoast and then go this isn't even good. Well of course not because I picked it green and you're getting it weeks later. We found out very quickly that there wasn't a market for that although we didn't have access to produce and food there people would kind of already condition themselves to pick up on the way home from work or what they can get it at a convenience mart, get milk and
eggs stuck there which can produce so we

00:26:21.000 --> 00:26:25.920
actually never even looked at the patients
that I was sitting next to. It felt

00:26:25.930 --> 00:26:29.990
really intrusive to talk to them about what
I was doing and be one more person that

00:26:30.000 --> 00:26:33.920
told them one more thing that they should
do to take care of themselves when you're

00:26:33.930 --> 00:26:38.820
in treatment people I love them all to
death but people they poke you and prod you

00:26:38.830 --> 00:26:42.210
and tell you and other patients tell you
and it's just like you know what I just

00:26:42.220 --> 00:26:46.570
want one moment where somebody isn't telling me all about my life and what's

00:26:46.580 --> 00:26:49.850
coming next and what's happening so I felt
that it was really really intrusive to

00:26:49.860 --> 00:26:55.790
do that. Last November I was in
remission for eighteen months and last.

00:26:56.990 --> 00:27:01.070
November we went out to dinner for the
holidays with my infusion nurse who when you

00:27:01.080 --> 00:27:06.560
spend two years every day with her, for seven hours,
we became pretty close. So we went to
Oral History Conversation with Stepheni Norton

00:27:06.570 --> 00:27:10.280
dinner and celebrated her recent engagement. We
were just talking about farming kind of

00:27:10.290 --> 00:27:15.230
everything and, she's said I need to ask
you, who is you who is your customer basically

00:27:15.240 --> 00:27:19.380
like how are things going, who is your customer. oh well now we're with chefs, we never went to

00:27:19.390 --> 00:27:23.250
farmers' markets just we never went there
but

00:27:23.250 --> 00:27:26.250
it was to shops in the local community.
We have farm stands

00:27:26.250 --> 00:27:29.630
Kind of around our community and she's
like OK, why? I'm like, well that's our

00:27:29.640 --> 00:27:34.810
community like your community it's right
here it's close and she was like mhmm, your community is the

00:27:34.820 --> 00:27:39.060
people that sit in chairs, just like you
your community is the people that need

00:27:39.100 --> 00:27:44.740
exactly what you need and can't have it
and don’t know where to get it. We aren’t

00:27:44.750 --> 00:27:49.770
just an organic farm were one hundred
percent heirloom organic farm. So we have seeds from
the 700s to the early 1900s. We don’t have anything

genetically modified or mainly hybridized and what that means for

a patient that has no immune system is that you, you are significantly less

likely to have an anti or inflammatory response to something you’re eating so you’re not having

a histamine response because you’re not you don’t have pesticides on it. You’re

not getting fed a pluot and then you find out you’re allergic to plums which is a plum

and an apricot. So it’s just not there so she sat there dinner and she was like

that’s your community and she said I’m not telling you to sell to you but I’m just
telling you Don’t forget how you got right here, and we drove home and like I can
tell you I was really upset the car. I was like, I, you know, I never wanted to be
disrespectful to anybody else going to
treatment or be intrusive in their life and

00:28:36.240 --> 00:28:40.720
my husband was like, I have faith that you
will do what you feel is right for for

00:28:40.730 --> 00:28:46.110
yourself and us and the business and everything.
The next day I text her and I said, Hey

00:28:46.120 --> 00:28:50.620
can I meet you again and just they go over
an idea that I have. She was like, yeah. So we met

00:28:50.630 --> 00:28:55.260
and I was like, I want to do this Farmacy
thing and I want to have the stages of

00:28:55.270 --> 00:29:00.750
it where if I think through what I needed
when I went through treatment and like

00:29:00.760 --> 00:29:06.220
your very first diagnosis like even though
I was sick for so long, When my doctor

00:29:06.230 --> 00:29:09.380
gave us the diagnosis, that day he was like,
you're going to the infusion chair. I was

00:29:09.390 --> 00:29:13.230
like I can't. I've got to go to my base, in
Long Beach, because we lived here my base

00:29:13.380 --> 00:29:17.160
is in Long Beach and tell them, I'm starting treatment
and I'm probably going have to argue

00:29:17.170 --> 00:29:19.950
with them over it. He was
like that's fine. This was

00:29:19.960 --> 00:29:22.700
a Friday. He's like Monday morning you're
going to be in my chair or I'm going to

00:29:22.710 --> 00:29:29.310
put you in the hospital so that is your
choice. That day, when we started I.V.

00:29:29.320 --> 00:29:32.540
He's like, I'm going to tell you're probably
pissed. You're probably going to go home

00:29:32.890 --> 00:29:36.700
and eat like shit and drink and if you smoke you're
going to. I was like well I don't smoke. He's like, you're going to do all

00:29:36.710 --> 00:29:37.840
this and that's fine

00:29:38.260 --> 00:29:41.890
and he said that you can keep on doing that until
your anger subsides but I promise you it

00:29:41.900 --> 00:29:46.870
won't. And all you'll do is make your treatment
last longer. So he's like, if you can

00:29:46.880 --> 00:29:51.620
eat clean and do your best even if you're
at restaurants to make sure they're super

00:29:51.630 --> 00:29:55.010
clean and you don't catch anything because
somebody didn't washed their hands. He's like

00:29:55.020 --> 00:29:58.670
I'm going to kill your whole immune system
to kill this.

00:29:58.670 --> 00:30:01.670
That moment, I couldn't even stand up after treatment.

00:30:01.670 --> 00:30:06.120
We had to lay the car seat down
every time because I couldn't I was too

00:30:06.130 --> 00:30:09.350
dizzy from all the medicine it would
have been unsafe to stand over

00:30:09.360 --> 00:30:14.890
a stove and cook myself dinner. so that is
the late hundred percent we will take our

00:30:14.900 --> 00:30:17.660
produce with a private chef
who knows how to cook with

00:30:17.670 --> 00:30:22.660
heirloom varietals and heirloom grain and she will cook one
hundred percent of your meals and then

00:30:22.670 --> 00:30:23.320
you go through it for

00:30:23.330 --> 00:30:27.120
a little bit and now you're like able to
deal with the fact that you're getting all

00:30:27.130 --> 00:30:30.810
this chemical in need for medicine you're getting dizzy anymore, you're feeling

00:30:30.820 --> 00:30:34.860
better and you still need meals to take
with you to treatment because you have to

00:30:34.860 --> 00:30:38.650
Pre-em post. But you want to cook a little bit more, you want to be able to have a salad with your family you want to be able to eat

00:30:45.990 -- 00:30:50.410
come home and drop me off to make sure I had food. and then he would be like, Babe I got to go to work so we wanted this, like back to being able to sit and have some sense of normalcy and then eventually get to a point you’re back into cooking for yourself and that you can do all those things

and that’s our C.S.A.

Part of it so it was really kind of breaking it into these three chunks and saying if I had to take somebody through treatment. I don’t I never wanted to and I can’t imagine that somebody wants to say for the rest of my life somebody is going to
00:31:11.810 --> 00:31:14.680
cook for me, somebody's going to tell me
what to eat, somebody's going to put

00:31:14.690 --> 00:31:20.760
a needle in my arm but they’re, these are
life threatening and they’re life changing

00:31:20.910 --> 00:31:23.740
but you don’t have to
succumb to like being in

00:31:23.750 --> 00:31:27.760
a dark corner and just taking everything
that is thrown at you. And I was like

00:31:27.770 --> 00:31:34.020
this is what I want to do. She's like, I think it's
wonderful and we launched it in January on

00:31:34.030 --> 00:31:36.260
the exact same day that I
found out it was no longer

00:31:36.270 --> 00:31:43.210
a mission and started I.V. treatment again.
So it was it

00:31:44.180 --> 00:31:49.330
it was amazing. And we, we announced it and we expected. We have

00:31:49.340 --> 00:31:53.640
a max of twenty based on, that we can take
twenty patients we can take based on the

00:31:53.650 --> 00:32:00.460
chef that we work with and we
expected to maybe hit two or three or
four by summer and then by the end of the year we'd probably be eight it would take about two years and we're up to eight right now. We did like three instantly now we're up to eight. We have a couple more people coming so we expect by summer to be fully at capacity and it's patients that are just like me that need it just like I said

Evan: Do you ever get to talk to? Stepheni: Every day. yesterday I walked into treatment and I walked in and. My nurse that oh Stepheni talked to this person and she was like, Wait you're Stepheni? and I'm like yeah. and she like turns around her laptop. She's just like, I'm ordering right now.

I was like well, I guess I'll be at your house on Monday. But yeah and she and then she was just talking and she's got some pretty pretty extreme medical issues that has landed her with like steam chicken and broccoli and she's like I can't eat
with my family and I can’t
do this and I used to be

a gourmet cook and I would make big meals
and have dinner parties and she’s like my
goal was to get back to that, So what can I
do to get from here to there and if that

means eating right and listening to what
Doc says that I’m going to do it and she’s

there and we, every single patient that we
have that’s in our program, whether like

it or not, they have to talk to me and talk
to them every week. Because we, yeah we

just want to make sure the everything’s
right for them, you know, when they’re

we don’t we don’t like work with doc to get
their info, they tell us their info but

with that also becomes like OK how does you
feel actuate that because it’s not just

like no I can’t have gluten. Well that’s
not necessarily true you can’t have
commercially grown gluten that is dried in the field with geo-phosphates but

you can probably have an heirloom varietal. So if you want to try it, we'll try that if you're too afraid and you don't want to do that, that's fine too. There are some people that will find out that they actually can have gluten or they can have sugars. Just not a lot of it but they can have natural sugars instead of process sugars. Those type of things.

So we talk to them every day every Monday.

Mitch: From working with people you give Farmacy boxes to, what's the most rewarding part of just like sharing your story, and then seeing how they progress through their various diseases.

Stepheni: I think the the most rewarding part of it is for them
to realize

00:34:29.130 --> 00:34:32.130
they're not alone. Like you can sit in

00:34:32.207 --> 00:34:35.207
a treatment center, and there's like rows
of chairs right so like

00:34:35.630 --> 00:34:38.630
obviously, logically you know you're not alone.

00:34:38.630 --> 00:34:44.440
Right, there's somebody on set half of this
but it's still this kind of, it's like the

00:34:44.449 --> 00:34:49.710
rain cloud that follows you, it's like your own right
you're like what did I do to deserve this

00:34:49.760 --> 00:34:54.880
When I was still on active
duty I reeled in my sailor mouth

00:34:54.889 --> 00:34:59.290
a lot but when I was still on active duty
I had some really interesting conclusions

00:34:59.300 --> 00:35:03.960
about, what I could have done to get sec
and how the military would have treated me

00:35:03.970 --> 00:35:09.420
for that and they were very colorful and
inappropriate but, you do walk around like

00:35:09.430 --> 00:35:14.680
what do they do why is it here nobody
understands, and food is something that kind
of we’re all raised regardless of culture
that like this is how you get back to

community break bread together you have

a conversation and when you’re all of a
sudden you know you’re sitting in

a treatment chair with

a tray and you’re eating and you’re just like, are
you kidding me like this is my life this

is I’m back in trip now
and I’m at four hours

a day which is way better than
seven but it’s still four hours

a day and that’s from the time
I leave my house to the time

I get back so its certainly way shorter than it used to be
but there’s still this like when I get

back four hours

a day this can be amazing and being able
to connect with them make them realize
that there’s other people out here
you can be OK you don’t have to

sit in this... there’s

a mental part of it that will keep you from
healing and when you feel alone it gets

worse and I think being able to talk to
people and having them realize that there’s

somebody else that gets it and there’s
somebody else that experience it and then

they meet me and like realize that I’m
the crazy person even though I’m not

supposed to still goes on you know like eighty
mile hikes with my husband because I’m

like well what’s the worst that’s going to happen
my body is going to give out and you’ll take me out but

if not I’m going to sit here and I’m going
to be resentful because I haven’t lived my

life. Yeah so I think that that part of
it being able to talk to people and get
them to realize that like
this isn’t the rest of your life, this is

a damn bug that bit you know and bite back, right
like you just have to push it back.

Mitch: How much of the recovery process do you think
has been helped by the eating healthy

foods or versus being able to work at the
farm and then being able to help people

with Farmacy boxes or just
like getting back into

like a daily routine.
Stepheni: While I was undergoing my first
round of treatment I would say that

when we first started growing we were just
growing food so we got seeds at like Home Depot

and just growing food and I was still
having sensitivities to it, I was still having

anti-inflammatory responses or inflammatory
responses. When we moved over to

heirloom and completely organic
but organic seeds in their
own bridles. My treatment protocol was like almost textbook working better like there's

a treatment protocol, there's

a couple different treatment protocols for Lyme my Dr., when he asked me basically like how

much I can handle when it because that's how they determine like if you mentally

can't handle being in there seven hours late there's no way because you're going to

go with it in

a month in the year and walk away and it's going to be like not finishing your

antibiotics that actually makes it way worse so for me I was like, you can put me in

a coma, take out all my blood and put it back, whatever you have to do I want to be

done in a month like I got shit to do. He was like, it's not going to be a month. So for
00:38:00.520 --> 00:38:06.120
me making that change it helped my treatment protocol
like literally step down textbook like

00:38:06.130 --> 00:38:07.330
we say expect this much of

00:38:07.340 --> 00:38:10.740
a reduction in activity but this day and
it was doing it and we can tell the

00:38:10.750 --> 00:38:16.420
difference and I can also tell you when I
went back and had family dinner the first

00:38:16.430 --> 00:38:20.500
year because all my family was like super
supportive so big holiday dinner right.

00:38:21.680 --> 00:38:26.840
Kept on going down the next year when they
were like Oh she's fine now. And there was

00:38:26.850 --> 00:38:31.140
a whole bunch of crap in the food like
my activity levels go back up because the bacteria

00:38:31.150 --> 00:38:35.210
actually feeds on processed sugars and
things like that so I could definitely see

00:38:35.220 --> 00:38:39.780
it there the farm work my husband would
tell you it's the only thing that kept me from

00:38:39.820 --> 00:38:44.470
eating a bullet, flat out. Like he's like, I
didn't think that I would have you for

00:38:44.480 --> 00:38:50.940
a full year. So there's
something very very

00:38:51.830 --> 00:38:55.120
it's probably anecdotal because I don't know
how much data is around there but

00:38:55.630 --> 00:39:00.940
there's something, very truthful about
putting your hands in the dirt and seeing

00:39:00.950 --> 00:39:04.490
something when you feel like you're dying
you just make something grow like that

00:39:04.530 --> 00:39:10.720
there's something very emotionally important
that happens there. And that still I

00:39:10.730 --> 00:39:14.880
can tell you I can have my worst day in
treatment or in work with you know

00:39:14.890 --> 00:39:15.910
a chef that's being

00:39:15.920 --> 00:39:21.430
a chef and walking outside and just digging
in the dirt and pulling weeds and all

00:39:21.440 --> 00:39:25.360
that stuff,
like that will change your perspective because
you don't get to walk away from the

00:39:25.370 --> 00:39:30.310
garden you don't get to ignore it I
mean it's not you can't send it to

00:39:30.320 --> 00:39:33.520
a babysitter it's like every day for the rest of your life somebody has to pay attention to it and I can tell you when we're gone like if we go take a three day and go to a class or something when we come back and all of a sudden, I'm like, oh my gosh, the fig tree like it was nothing and now look at it I mean it's, or you go what just happened and like you know all your melons are rotten. But it kind of gives you a different focus that's like bigger than yourself I mean I assume that's what people that have kids said too right, it gets, this is bigger than yourself and you have to take care of it and then you realize that actually if everybody did it we could resolve the hunger issue right it doesn't take much I mean you can grow in
your front yard and resolve your family's fingers so now.

Mitch: I know you talked earlier that you weren't doing farmers markets have you ever thought about maybe expanding, doing a farmers market in like little Italy, like in San Diego closer to National city. Because I worked at to farmers market during the summer.

We had an organic farm too just branch around and share the food more what are your thoughts on that? Stepheni: The reason we don't do farmers' markets so for all the farmers' markets in the area and the data shows that this is across the board that within the last five years the purchasing of actually fresh fruits and vegetables has gone down significantly it's almost been cut in half so farms that have that as their main source of income have gone from like a million dollars a year
to less than five hundred thousand dollars

00:41:00.460 --> 00:41:03.570
a year especially on the East Coast that’s very much California it’s that way too

00:41:03.840 --> 00:41:09.520
becomes a tourist attraction. Yeah exactly I mean you go and pick up like

00:41:09.560 --> 00:41:16.090
a bunch of herbs and you feel very empowered that experience right. But it’s really

00:41:16.100 --> 00:41:20.230
costly at the back end to go to farmer’s market insurance is really high, what you

00:41:20.240 --> 00:41:23.550
have to have related to packaging and storefront type things as

00:41:23.560 --> 00:41:26.860
a high. But more importantly you have to have

00:41:26.870 --> 00:41:29.590
a full table especially around here you have to have

00:41:29.600 --> 00:41:30.840
a full table when you start and

00:41:30.850 --> 00:41:34.160
a full table when you end and we started the farm because we’re in

00:41:34.170 --> 00:41:36.630
a food desert right it was for me but it’s
Oral History Conversation with Stepheni Norton

00:41:36.640 --> 00:41:42.240
a food desert so we don't feel that it's really aligned with our values if for me

00:41:42.250 --> 00:41:43.130
to make

00:41:43.140 --> 00:41:49.120
X Dollars, I have to take produce that is now completely it's not even I refuse to

00:41:49.130 --> 00:41:52.620
donate produce that's like wilted and nasty just because I want to feel

00:41:52.630 --> 00:41:57.170
better about myself, like if it's been sitting out for four hours and it was picked at either

00:41:57.180 --> 00:42:00.000
four am or the day before and I have to have

00:42:00.010 --> 00:42:04.340
a whole table from start to finish that produce that there at the finish isn't usable

00:42:04.350 --> 00:42:11.090
any more. And when you look at that it's it's literally not worth the money. If you

00:42:11.100 --> 00:42:14.690
are making there are some that makes thousands and thousands of dollars but they

00:42:14.700 --> 00:42:19.040
also have you know ten twenty thirty one hundred acres that they're producing on.

00:42:19.470 --> 00:42:20.040
We're producing on

00:42:20.050 --> 00:42:25.170
a quarter of an acre so when you when
you break down the cost it's the most

00:42:25.180 --> 00:42:30.920
financially viable when people come to us
or when they buy online, so either they buy it at a

00:42:30.930 --> 00:42:35.490
farm store or they buy online and we
deliver to them. But it's hard because getting your

00:42:35.500 --> 00:42:39.490
name out there is farmers'
markets they don't people

00:42:39.590 --> 00:42:43.540
a lot of people don't understand that there
are farms that don't attend farmers'

00:42:43.550 --> 00:42:47.540
markets, I talked to the Department of
Agriculture today and we're like Oh we're

00:42:47.550 --> 00:42:50.770
having our quarterly
meeting are you going to come it's on

00:42:50.780 --> 00:42:55.070
a Monday because that's the only non
farmer's market day and I was like. Ms. Winters

00:42:55.080 --> 00:42:57.890
we don't go to farmers' markets
and that's our chef delivery day

00:42:57.900 --> 00:43:04.370
and shes like, oh I always forget that. That's OK, so
yeah so it's hard because you want to get

your name out there. But you don't want it to be your marketing dollars that are

taking

a farmer's market and for me personally I can't be on my feet that long so it's

balancing what that is we took once we got to

a point that our yields were so high that we could go to

a market if wanted to we took. That basically income and we built

a store on our property and then we're open every Monday and as we get more

people than will be open another day another day so to really keep the keep it

within our community the way that we wanted to. Mitch: I think we

talked for the allotted time. I'm really inspired by your story.
Thank you so much for coming and talking on here and sharing all your info.

00:43:53.640 --> 00:43:55.910
Stepheni: Absolutely thank you so much.

— End of Transcription —