



Titans as Teens

Transcript: Neil Strauss Episode 5

The podcast is here:

<https://www.titansasteens.com/neil-strauss--author-and-journalist/>

[Theme music]

Brody [00:00:07] Hey all, Brody here, there with a new episode of Titans As Teens, a podcast where I have detailed conversations with interesting people from all walks of life, about their experience and knowledge they have for teens today. Today, I have author Neil Strauss.

Neil [00:00:22] The first thing I think what I think about of high school is that moment when I go to the cafeteria and I have a tray with all my shitty unhealthy food on it, and I'm looking around at these tables full of people thinking, where do I sit? Like that to me is the moment that embodies who you are in high school. And then I look at a table and I'd always be at what they literally called in high school, like the loser table. Like I would be right there and being made home and welcome to Loser Table. And so, and then it's feeling, Well, am I a loser? I guess I am, because the loser table is where I'm most comfortable and where I've welcomed.

[00:00:54] Neal is a world-renowned author and character for many different reasons. He's the author of seven bestsellers, most infamous being *The Game*, Neil's story of entering the world of pickup artists, becoming one of the best of all time, and what he learned in the process. As well as incredible biographies such as *The Long, Hard Road Out of Hell* with Marilyn Manson and *The Dirt* with Mötley Crüe. Neil is also a very prolific journalist and writer for magazines such as *Rolling Stone*, *The New York Times* and so on. He's done numerous things outside of writing, however, such as DJing, acting, writing music, and more. I was able to steal an hour of his precious time to have a conversation. I really hope you enjoy listening as much as I did.

[00:01:39] [Music up and ends cold]. .

Brody [00:01:41] I'm really curious how you started writing, right, because obviously I've read *The Game* and sadly, my mom didn't appreciate that, but you never really talked about your life before becoming a pickup artist.

Neil [00:01:55] Yeah, I think I never just did...let's see. Let me think. There's like a couple of things I want to untangle.

[00:02:02] First one being I think I probably talked about my life beforehand in there, but only as far as like dating was concerned, not really writing because it was a book about understanding dating. I definitely wouldn't think of becoming a pickup artist, definitely that wasn't the intention. The intention was really to get over the social anxiety. And certainly,



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you know, the message needed to be said, that becoming a pickup artist is probably one of the worst goals one could choose in life, if that's the choice. It feels like at least is sort of had, probably during that time, but since then, really speaks to any sort of manipulation. Almost like the way you started this conversation was like, ah, let's just have a conversation. And that's probably the way to go about life without an agenda, (laughs) or a manipulation to get something you want. Anyway, I wanted to unpack those things in the question. Now, you're going back to what was my early life like before then. And what anything specific you want to get into on that, whether it's writing or social experiences or what?

Brody [00:03:01] Yeah, we're going to talk a lot about that. I wanted to, in this, kind of avoid talking about your whole career as a pickup artist, The Game, all of that, just because, like, I feel like it's been rehashed too much. You've talked about it enough.

Neil [00:03:12] Right?

Brody [00:03:13] So. What I wanted to start with was, how you started writing in the first place.

Neil [00:03:18] And by the way, I'm happy to answer any even if it's been rehashed, I feel like any answer that comes out of curiosity is probably a good question, even if it's been rehashed. I noticed that if I watch, if I'm watching people who are high [up], who can ask the same question zillions of times and they're really on a giant public pedestal, I notice that if someone asks out of genuine curiosity, they're always happy to get back into that stuff. So, I'm happy. I feel like nothing should be off the table.

[00:03:42] But as far as writing goes, for me, it came from living in a home where I was never understood. Like living in a home where I felt like my voice wasn't heard, my needs didn't matter. And I really just felt alienated and confused. But I found that, first it was the reading. I found through reading, it was sort of an escape and I could connect with all these people and lives that I couldn't normally. And then second, then writing for me was a way like, oh, I can really in my home, you couldn't complete a sentence without getting interrupted (laughs).

Brody [00:04:18] Yah.

[00:04:18] And then an idea, without being told you're wrong. You know, there was a constant barrage of criticism. And writing to me felt safe, if I can really sit there and write and explain my thoughts and my point of views and articulate them and present it in a full, complete package. So, to me, writing with such an outlet for that. So, I think it started there. And then I remember like when they were writing contest in school, I would often sort of submit and win that contest.

[00:04:44] But the big thing for me, outside of the psychological element, was I took a class in 11th or 12th grade, and the teacher was a guy named Mr. Baker, who I think it was an Olympic athlete, swimmer, was in a car accident and was paralyzed from the waist



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down. And he was a swim coach at school, and he taught Ulysses, James Joyce's Ulysses, which is amazing. And when I read Ulysses, I was I was just blown away. I just didn't know that through writing. You could, it could be so complex and could communicate so much...I was just...I didn't understand the power of words before that. And that was really what made me want to be a writer.

Brody [00:05:22] Was your family structure like back then? Like, do you have any siblings?

Neil [00:05:26] Yeah. So, I had a younger brother, a mom and a dad, and my mom was handicapped, so we had for a while, up until 12 we had like a live-in kind of babysitter who did the things with us my mom couldn't.

Brody [00:05:40] I want to get more into, like the feeling of high school. Probably not a good feeling, but we're going to go there anyways.

Neil [00:05:46] Yeah.

Brody [00:05:46] Is there a song you can remember that was like your anthem at the time?

Neil [00:05:51] Interesting question, these are songs, my anthem of... Let's see, I'm trying to remember. I was really into like the alternative into like alternative music and punk rock and like The Clash, you know, I felt like I was trapped and by a lot of rules and trapped by a lot of shoulds, and that I couldn't self-express. So, I just felt like the punk rock or the angry music, spoke to me because it was it unleashed stuff.

Brody [00:06:17] Yeah. I mean, to be honest, I'm into the same shit today,

Neil [00:06:21] Right, that's awesome.

Brody [00:06:22] Probably like 20 years later.

Neil [00:06:23] But what artists today?

Brody [00:06:23] They're probably after you stop listening to them. But Sum 41. I'm sure you've heard of Blink 182.

Neil [00:06:31] Of course.

Brody [00:06:31] Yeah. All those. The classics. The Smiths.

Brody [00:06:34] Cool, yeah, The Smiths was back then too for the Smiths. Spoke to me too. On that same level. Anything that was sort of an outsider expressing themselves like I connected with. I feel like you are looking for an identity growing up and a sense of belonging, and for some reason music and the genre of music you listen to, when you're



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younger, feels like it's the early sense of belonging. Are you a hippie? Are you punk rocker, are you into the trap scene or what's your what's your scene? And I feel like music is the beginning of that kind of identity formation. And then if you're older, once you don't feel like I need an identity to know who I am, you actually start listening then you start any music that's good.

Brody [00:07:14] Yeah, I mean, it's crazy how universal that is to every generation these days. How, listening to music. I like this music. You don't like this music. We're not together.

Neil [00:07:24] Yeah. Yeah, totally.

Brody [00:07:24] I'm sure it's not that bad, but it's just cool to me. And you definitely have a lot more insight on this than I do, speaking as someone who wrote for Rolling Stone or still does. Excuse me.

Neil [00:07:35] Yeah, no, it's funny to, like that person who found music is their identity in school, listening to music, finding new music, then then you get to meet all the people who you idolized and it's a real treat. Yeah.

Brody [00:07:48] Obviously you interviewed The Strokes and that was a pretty famous interview, but is there any other artist from your childhood that you got to meet that was really like, holy shit?

Neil [00:07:58] Yeah. I mean, I think probably like I think I got to meet like everybody who was living. Like who I loved. But they're definitely weird and trying to think of, like there's so many weird moments, especially in L.A., where you're just in a room and there might be five of them or something. It might be an obscure artist you were into, not the person who was the most the most famous. Or they're asking you for advice on something. Those are weird moments. Definitely, when I wrote The Game, a lot of people who I idolized, called up for dating advice. (laughs) Except maybe except in my case, where it's like, oh, I met this girl at a concert - I met this woman at a concert who was super cool. And I don't know what to do now. I got a phone number, I'm scared. And there, with these people, it was like, I've met this other actor or something where I'm helping them, it was the same problems that I experienced in school or just it was very interesting, you start to realize that these problems we're facing, we feel alone in, are universal, I think that's what ties it together. Music makes you feel not alone. If you're sad and some sad music, you're like, oh, other people are sad, and I feel connected. And you start to realize that the problems you face, you're not alone in them.

Brody [00:09:08] Yeah. And we also tend to forget that, like, the people making those music are human as well. They're not just godly figures.

Neil [00:09:15] Exactly, people get disillusioned when they see that their idols are human.

Brody [00:09:18] Yeah,



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Neil [00:09:19] But I think if they kept having that expectation for them not to be perfect is probably a good idea.

Neil [00:09:23] But what was the weirdest thing you realized about the music industry as an outsider?

Neil [00:09:27] Let's see. The weirdest thing. Let's see. There's so many weird things about it, but. I think I think I remember like the story, I remember that the Backstreet Boys, at the height of their fame, came to me and they wanted to do a story. And they were the biggest pop group at the time. But how they weren't making any royalties off their music. I thought, this is insane. You sold 50 million records or whatever it is, and you're literally not making royalties off your music. We assume these assume these people are just anyone with a hit is filthy rich. We don't realize and it's funny how everything ties together. We're talking about systemic issues, that like everybody's getting rich off them, and they're not. I know so many people who are household names, who are just flat broke, but people just have profited off them and then consume them and then discarded them and move on to the next person. So, I think that was the big thing, is that you assume, you assume these people who are mega successful, with these giant tours are just raking it in. And you don't see that all these leeches get around them and they've signed bad deals. And these people are just they're just being exploited.

Brody [00:10:29] I mean, it kind of relates back to what we were saying earlier about them being human. We forget... like even you to some people, probably, they think you're living the life. But no, we're all human.

Neil [00:10:41] I do my best to dissuade anyone of any notion that I'm, that I'm perfect, or hero worship. But for a while I was getting like, all these messages, "you're a God" and those kind of things, and I literally will do I will do my best to dissuade. I think it's just I don't think it's good to put people on a pedestal as better than you, because that's...what does that mean about you? You know? It's like you're saying you're not enough and also like you're going to get disillusioned. I was really trying to put my imperfections first, in the book you're talking about in all the books, I try to say these are all the things that are wrong with me and messed up with me. And I also think it's healthier for me, or anyone, not to pretend to be perfect. I think in the culture, it's the hypocrites. It's when people are hypocritical, you could feel it and smell it. And but I guess it's sad. They feel like I need to have people think I'm perfect to feel OK about myself or whatever it is. I really think that being authentic about your failings, and owning them, and still working on them, is probably a good thing, a good way to go about life. Because it's easy for people to get sucked into their own myth and then live up to a standard that's impossible.

Brody [00:11:58] I mean, we've seen that with countless stars. I don't really need to rehash it.

Neil [00:12:03] Yeah.



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Brody [00:12:03] I think we should start talking more about your high school life, because I want to get into the pain.

Neil [00:12:08] Yes, let's get into the pain.

Brody [00:12:09] And in The Game, you only really talked about it in a couple of sentences, as you mentioned previously You didn't have much dates, or many dates, excuse me, But I'm kind of like, away from girls and sex and all that. How was your social life like?

Neil [00:12:23] Yeah, I mean, I really didn't I didn't have much of a social life. Like I definitely like I don't know., if this is true for you. I'm curious, and it might just be a universal thing. The first thing I think to think about a high school is that moment when I go to the cafeteria and I have a tray with all my shitty unhealthy food on it. And hopefully they're better today. But and then I'm looking around at these tables full of people and thinking, where do I sit. Like that to me is the moment that embodies who you are in high school. And I want to hear if that was true for you or not. And then I look at a table and I would always be at what they literally called in high school, like the loser table, like I would be right there and be made home and welcome to the loser table and I and so and then it's feeling well, am I a loser? I guess I am, because I'm, the loser table is where I'm most comfortable and where I've welcomed. And so that was it. It was like grabbing the tray and then maybe sometimes you have the courage to sit on another table and sit there so uncomfortable. And you know you don't belong there, you're scared you're going to get asked to leave. It was really it was really...

Brody [00:13:21] Toxic?

Neil [00:13:22] It's toxic. It's crazy. And I don't feel that it's changed. But what was your what was your experience being?

Neil [00:13:29] My experience is probably different than most people these days just because I've gone to private school.

Brody [00:13:33] Right.

Neil [00:13:34] So I only had ninety kids in my grade. I knew everyone.

Neil [00:13:37] Right.

Brody [00:13:37] But I can absolutely confirm for my friends in public school that that's still a thing. We these days we call it cliques, you know, the groups of kids that only hang out with their circle. But I think it's gotten better. It's not at that level where, if you aren't a cool kid, you can't sit with them. But it's still present.

Neil [00:13:57] It's true. There are... and this was actually a private school in Chicago. But I think it's true. There weren't anti-bullying campaigns, anti-bullying messages. I guess it's



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really reassuring to hear at least there's a little bit more, there's a little bit more self-awareness at least where you went.

[00:14:14] The most interesting thing, though, is you go back and you go to reunions and you talk to the people you thought were popular and had it easy, and then they, and even for them, it was a rough experience. And they talked about being picked on and not being comfortable. And that's what we said earlier, is this universal experience that you think only you're experiencing.

Brody [00:14:31] Mmm.

Neil [00:14:31] And again, all the people I know who are so highly successful felt like they were like really had a rough high school experience. There just seems to be a one-to-one correspondence with who...with....like....and I'm not sure which comes first. Is it that you're, maybe have artistic sensibility or a special sensitivity or a certain kind of intellect or you're that and that those things that help you stand out, make you special, also make you get picked on and beaten down in school? Or is it that, by not fitting in and not being accepted out of the real world, you find acceptance through music, art, entrepreneurship, whatever it is. I don't I don't I don't know. But it's interesting to be true.

Brody [00:15:13] That's a good question. Actually, I've no idea. I've yet to find someone on this podcast, actually, who said they had a good high school experience.

Neil [00:15:21] Right.

Brody [00:15:21] So I think it's kind of universal, like maybe the popular kids are always just trying too hard and they stop losing sight of like, oh, wait, I actually have a ton of friends and everyone likes me.

Neil [00:15:31] Right.

Brody [00:15:31] Maybe I should stop trying.

Neil [00:15:34] Right. Like, the real thing is, like it would be a miserable existence to have peaked in high school. I also think, too, it's like if you're in a very small reality at this point, the reality, say as an adult, you can literally live in almost any community, in almost any country and leave your job and choose any other reality. In high school, you're really kind of dependent on this very small social ecosystem and it's rough. And now you can get shamed to such a degree that it haunts you through your adult life. You know, if you're cyber bullied, that can stick to you as you're finding a job and it's still that traces still exist. I think it's even probably harder now.

Brody [00:16:14] Yeah, I mean, because these days people say it doesn't matter if you're popular in high school, people like you in high school, and that that may be true, but it comes with that sort of added baggage of if you're not popular and people don't like you,



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and you could have some sort of built up trauma from, like, just being shit on your entire childhood.

Neil [00:16:31] Yes, I know it doesn't matter, but it fucking hurts.

Brody [00:16:34] Exactly.

Neil [00:16:35] It's cool. I get that right. I get that. I know I'm going to be out of here in two years, but I still got to survive and to walk into a place where I'm somehow told that I'm not enough or not good enough or whatever. When I went through like a period of intense, intensely being bullied, where I would hide in the school because there were people waiting for me after school. Where I'd have to just hide in the school. And it really it really, definitely shook me for a long time.

[00:17:02] I really feel like that was the end of my innocence, that that that that before I would just go through school and, you know, just at whatever. Weird, awkward. I was always picked last for the teams that which I never minded, like it didn't traumatize because I didn't have any pride in terms of being a great athlete or something.

[00:17:17] But that moment and it was eighth grade where I was really relentlessly, mercilessly, mercilessly bullied and the fear of school and the fear of school ending and leaving the safety of that small fenced in world, that moment was just so terrifying for me. And then after that, I think I just for some reason, I just lost something. It changed me for the rest of high school.

Brody [00:17:43] Hmm. Physical bullying is kind of out.

Neil [00:17:44] Right.

Brody [00:17:44] Emotional bullying is the new cool thing,

Neil [00:17:47] Interesting.

Brody [00:17:47] ...which might be more damaging, to be honest,

Neil [00:17:49] Yes just damaging in different ways, right?

Brody [00:17:49] Yeah.

Neil [00:17:52] And what's the, the emotional bullying is... how does that show up?

Brody [00:17:56] It's more isolation, you know. Trying to cut off people from what friends they may have, sort of making them feel lesser. It's all the shit that you see today with those terrible stories of kids committing suicide. That that's the reason.



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Neil [00:18:10] Yeah. Yeah. So, it's sort of like I'm going to spread, I'm going to spread a story about this person and make it uncool for anyone to hang out with this person and completely. Yeah. And again, I think that still existed just without that online component. That makes it all the more terrifying...

Brody [00:18:26] The online enables it so much.

Neil [00:18:28] ...because you can be humiliated, at least before you could be humiliated within your school. Now you can be humiliated to a scale of millions that I think the human brain is not meant to comprehend, to handle. We're not meant our brain is not meant to handle shame on the level of millions or tens of millions.

Brody [00:18:48] Speaking of shame, what was the worst you ever messed up in high school?

Neil [00:18:53] I think the worst ever messed up. And again, it's so funny from that striving to fit in and striving to belong. I think, like there was an elevator and some kid got a hold of it. I don't this is just the first thing that comes to mind. But some kid got a hold of the elevator keys and I think I bought one for him, probably not even because I wanted a key to the elevator take it, because he was the cool kid and me buying it somehow was a connection with that person.

[00:19:15] And then he got caught and there was a disciplinary meeting. And we all sat there. And the most amazing thing happened in the meeting, which is: all of us owned it, and this is very Trumpian I guess, that all of us owned our stuff. And he didn't. He completely like just put on this mask and say and was really kind of penitent and was very philosophical about it. And like, everybody got like five times the punishment that the ringleader did because he just knew how to how to spin it. It was an amazing... But the most I fucked up was, at any time, I fucked up, was doing things to doing things to belong, doing things to fit in, and doing things to be liked. And I probably think that's true throughout life. If you're doing it to fit in or be liked, it's good to question that decision.

Brody [00:20:01] I think the best way to prevent that kind of thing is I'm not sure if you've ever read The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People...

Neil [00:20:07] Yeah.

Brody [00:20:07] ...by Stephen Covey. He talks a lot about you have to make your own mission statement. You have to know constantly what your goal is and what you who you want to be. And if you're going to make a decision and that doesn't align with who you want to be, just don't do it.

Neil [00:20:25] Yeah, though it's hard to identify what one's value system is when you're that young and still trying to figure out who you are. I don't know if could've until. I don't know, even way after college. Yeah, but you know what? No one ever asked me the



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question. I probably could have if that question was available to me. I mean I even love that you're talking about it. That's awesome.

Brody [00:20:48] Yeah, I mean, what you come up with might not be what you agree with next year or even next month, but it couldn't keep you focused at the moment. And I think that's the important thing.

Neil [00:20:58] Sure, yeah, it doesn't have to be right. It doesn't have to be forever. But it's a place to start that. These are my boundaries.

Brody [00:21:01] Um hmm.

Neil [00:21:01] That's awesome.

Brody [00:21:04] Is there something that you did in high school, like outside of grades, studying, all that shit, that you think most people should do as well?

Brody [00:21:12] Yeah, I tend not to like the word should..you know what I mean...

Brody [00:21:14] yeah yeah, I know what you mean

Neil [00:21:15] Not because you're using it just because I feel like everybody has a path that's right for them, including all the negative stuff we're talking about because it makes you who you are and if you're happy with who you are...you... It's good to be grateful for all those experiences. Because nothing...I mean...all the. To be fortunate enough to have the resilience, to survive your wounds, it is it is a great thing. Not everyone survives and not everyone comes out the other side of them. So, but for in my case, I'm really grateful for all those experiences, even the negative ones. So, anything that I did that they should.... Well, I'll answer it this way.

[00:21:52] I think there's nothing I did that anyone else should do. Right, or should not do because... There's a story it's Yung told via Joseph Campbell, but he talks about the knights going to look for the Holy Grail. Right. The myth of the knights looking for the Holy Grail. They decide to have this adventure. They're going to look for the Holy Grail. And when looking for it, they all have to go into the forest with the deepest, darkest part of the forest to find the Holy Grail, which is, of course, is a metaphor for your unconscious mind. Right. But the key is you can't take it... you can't follow anyone else, and you can't take a path that already exists. Because you have to find and hack through your own path.

Brody [00:22:30] Mmh hmm.

Neil [00:22:30] And find the monsters and the demons that are there. So, I think everyone has a path that's unique to them. And so, I would never say there's anything I did that you should do. The only thing I would say that might be worth noticing, is and it ties back to what we're talking about earlier, is anything you enjoy doing that you're not told to do by an authority figure such as a parent, a guardian or a teacher, and you enjoy doing it, is



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probably a sign that that may be part of your calling. So, for me, loving to write, right? In second grade, in second grade, I wrote an essay in school about "What you want to be in here, grow up". And I found this only a couple a few years ago. It said, "When I grow up, I want to own like a thousands of books. I want to be a writer. I want to teach my son to ride a bike". It's weird that I forgot that in college I wanted to be a D.J. for a while and I came back to writing. It's funny, in second grade I knew that. And so, I guess, I guess the only shit I would have is helpful to pay attention to the things you enjoy that you're not told to do. Because that's probably where your passion lies.

Brody [00:23:36] Mmm. A lot of time as well, things you enjoy are things you're good at. So, I mean, I'm pretty sure there's a psychological correlation there.

Neil [00:23:42] Yeah. And I bet if you enjoy it, and you're not good at it, then it really is a passion and a calling. There's some things that...

Brody [00:23:48] Because once you get good.

Neil [00:23:49] Yeah. Like, like surfing. I love surfing. I'm certainly not good at it, and I don't do it for any other reason other than it feels good. Right. But I do I do agree with what you're saying, that there are certain things we get rewarded for and those start to become our calling. We get "oh, that's it. That's really good. You did a great job with that". You win the writing contests, you know. My getting those positive strokes that someone somehow grows a ... create, creates a path for us to follow. And there may be things that we could have been great at and we had a negative experience right away. And that door closed. As an example, I. I know someone who's a who's an Olympic athlete. Gold medalist. And early in life, their dad wanted them to be a surfer. Took him out surfing and it was too rough. The board hit the kid's head, the kid was bleeding, and he never wanted to surf again. And then because of that, became another type of athlete.

[00:24:40] So the message being, that exactly you're saying, that if you sometimes have negative experience early, versus a positive experience, it really does shape you in that direction. That's why as a parent, I try not to force my son to do anything that he's not going to...because you're more likely by forcing someone to have an experience because you think they should at that age, it's going to have the opposite effect. There's a word called enmeshment, which we all know what abandonment is. Abandoned as a parent not being present for your needs. But enmeshment is, when the child serves the need of the parent. I need you to do good because you're a reflection of me is an example of enmeshment. So, it's another type of abusive behavior, let's say, or traumatic or not positive behavior that we don't look at in our society. Or your success, or you need to be an athlete, or you need to do this, because I need to feel good about myself. Or even parents to make a child, a therapist or parents with so much anxiety that that they need the child to control the child all the time, so they feel safe. So, it's an interesting concept to understand enmeshment. And when a parent gets their needs fulfilled through a child, it really represses that child's development.

Brody [00:25:51] Hmm. The more you know...



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Neil [00:25:52] Yeah,

Brody [00:25:53] Yeah, well, I have a question now that I think any kind of parent that you just described would absolutely not want their child to hear.

Neil [00:26:01] (laughs) Great.

Brody [00:26:01] So I'm sure you remember from high school, and I'm pretty certain every single high schooler's top concern, if not one, two or three, is getting the boy or girl. And from the experience you have, what advice would you give to that high schooler?

Neil [00:26:17] As far as like I have, I'm attracted to this person that I want...like... want them to like me back?

Brody [00:26:22] Yes.

Neil [00:26:24] Let's see, what would I... I'm trying to think of what I would tell my son. I feel like there's a difference between. I feel like there's just a difference between what... it's funny The Game is really about, what works and where my head is now, it's kind of, what's right. Right?

Brody [00:26:39] Hmm, Yeah.

Neil [00:26:40] And I almost feel and again, so my advice now is different than I might have given at the height of The Game period, right. In The Game period I might say here are the things to do, to get the outcome you want. But now it just, now I'd really just say, "It's amazing that you're attracted to that person. It's really cool that you have those feelings for them and now, like, be awesome". Right? Now, like, hey, be someone worthy of that, which you're already worthy of that person's attention. But now I would say, like, now it's time just fucking be awesome. Like a magnet poise and coolness and social grace. Why don't you use this as an inspiration for you to become a better person?

Brody [00:27:22] Yeah.

Neil [00:27:23] And you might even find you really become a better person. You might look at this person now and think, oh, I'm shocked that I was ever that into them. You know, I really like my take on it now is, if you want to attract better people, it's about becoming a better person. That self-esteem, like water, seeks its own level. Like the person you're dating is somehow a meter for where you're at in your development. As so often it's like, I don't know if this is true then, but spent like every single person in school, every single, was like, was competing for the same three or four individuals, you know? and...

Brody [00:28:01] Still true.



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Neil [00:28:03] Yes, it's still true. So, it feels like are you really seeing them, or are you looking at, that's another question I would ask is, "Do you really like this person or do you like what they represent?"

Brody [00:28:13] Yeah that's a good point.

Neil [00:28:14] You know, because I certainly was guilty of this. Is that there were probably people, even though I felt like, even though I never really had, I had never really had a date in high school or a girlfriend or much of anything, that there were probably people who liked me. But I thought, oh. Socially, that may not work for me if I date that person. Oh, that's going to put me in this category and I just closed the door on intimacy and connection and belonging because I was so worried about what other people thought.

Brody [00:28:51] Hmm. What you said earlier about becoming your best self to attract them, really struck a chord with me. Because I remember from reading *The Game*, that was probably one of the only tips that I was like, oh, I actually really like that. I'm probably going to try and do that.

Neil [00:29:04] Right.

Brody [00:29:04] Where all the poahs would as a supplement to the, if you want to call it training, they would try and work out, like just be better really.

Neil [00:29:13] Right.

Brody [00:29:13] And I thought that was a very interesting point because it not everything is the way you say it.

Neil [00:29:21] Yeah. The way to elaborate on that whenever not. But I think that's that everything is the way you say it. In the terms of what. And explain what you mean by that?

Brody [00:29:28] I'm trying to say like not...*The Game* wasn't just if you say the right thing, you get the girl, right? You have you have to have some sort of prerequisite.

Neil [00:29:38] Correct.

Brody [00:29:38] But it doesn't mean like you have to be attractive previously. You just have to be a better version of yourself.

Neil [00:29:43] Yeah. And it really is true. I really and even if you look back on things, it really, it's just the amount of it, it's really...I can say one of the secrets is...not. we have so many... we wear our fears and insecurities on our on our body and our face and our bodies. And I often find it it's like if you think something is wrong with you, that it's going to be wrong with you. You don't think it's wrong with you, then it's not a problem.



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[00:30:11] We see this in our society that people who are seen as desirable figures, may have imperfections, but they are proud of them. One great line that I really did that was beautiful within in the in The Game and from those guys is: What you can't fix, you feature. Right? Well, cool, I love it that I have a big nose. I love it that I'm smaller than everybody else. I want to be like that small, powerful big nose guy who walks in funny and cocky and everyone has a great time around. Like, I'm going to love that about myself. Like, I wanted a nose job in school. And so, I remember asking my parents for a nose job and they said, listen, if this is really important to you and you really want it, you can go have that nose job. And I'm so glad for some reason I didn't do it. And it's like, what's that going to fix, man? What's it going to fucking fix? It's not going to fix anything. I'm still going to feel like I don't fit in.

Brody [00:31:03] hmm.

Neil [00:31:03] It's going to fix fucking nothing looking nothing. But we get caught in this matrix of all the ways in which we're not good enough, that nobody notices. But they notice that we don't have a comfortable relationship with our own selves. And that's what they notice.

Brody [00:31:20] Absolutely. Yeah. It really reminds me of I can't remember the name, but Brene Brown's book, it's about vulnerability. And she says, the only way to happiness and the only way to be truly accepted by other people is to be vulnerable yourself.

Neil [00:31:33] Yeah, so it's true. And it's funny because, people feel that one of the toxic things about The Game was this concept of the alpha male, you know. These guys, these people who feel like I got to be the alpha male and then this alpha male has no vulnerability, they're always the leader. And they're always with their chests puffed up. And they're always, they show no other emotion besides a neutral solidity and strength. And the and if you watch people, those people are inauthentic, not vulnerable, trying to maintain a giant facade. It's very fragile because can be threatened any time and it's highly unattractive and not compelling. It's just a sort of a sad mask.

[00:32:19] And I felt like that that was one of those kind of toxic concepts within that community that allowed that that made the house we were all living and just fall apart. You got all these people competing to be this big toxic concept of the alpha male. I think a lot of ways The Game, the story part of The Game, is really about, before the term existed, about toxic masculinity. About trying to fill into this role of what a man is supposed to be, and losing touch with your own, like you said, vulnerability and authenticity. And it's also it's part of the journey, it's just nice that we get out of it's you know, it's part of the journey is think trying something and having the self-awareness to realize that that's the wrong direction. At least it may hopefully get you closer to your self actual self actualization or you're your best self.

Brody [00:33:08] Yeah, shit, that's a really good answer. I keep being I, I'm always surprised when my guest gives, like, a fucking astounding answer and then I'm like, oh, wait, that's why they're here, why am I surprised. They're amazing...



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Neil [00:33:20] But to your credit is, a lot, most of these things are not things I've said or talked about, but by you coming from curiosity and you having a perspective that might be different than a highly experienced adult interviewer who does it for a living. And it's just, you know, it becomes a different experience. You are also creating those great answers in your guests.

[00:33:40] I was talking I was literally talking to someone today about "beginner's mind". The idea that people do things a lot, we think, oh, there must be an expert because they did it a lot, but then it can become a trap. It can be like, oh, because exactly what you were saying earlier about our passions and we get rewarded for it. People think, well, that's my way, that's my style of interviewing. This is what I'm good at. And then it becomes a trap and becomes a really, really hard to learn. And actually, I was talking to your dad, who literally was saying with the meditation groups he does, that people who do have a lot of meditation experience are the worst ones for it, because they think there's a right way and their way is right. Whereas having beginner's mind and having less experience can really be a strength.

Brody [00:34:24] They're not afraid to try things.

Neil [00:34:25] They're not and they're not. And they're not set in my way, this is my way, or this is the way. Right. And that person who is maybe dispensing wisdom, they start to be judgmental about it "well, no, that doesn't correspond with what's worked for me. That doesn't correspond with how I do it". And they miss learning opportunities.

Brody [00:34:43] Yeah. I mean, there's just so much sunk cost fallacy if you've been doing it for that long to realize it's not the right way. I can imagine why it would be hard. But I mean, if you want to be the best, you probably have a challenge that.

Neil [00:34:54] I would even argue then that your your...there's more sunk cost in continuing to do it in a way that's not serving you. There's diminishing returns. And so that probably is questioning yourself questioning, questioning what you believe at all times is probably really valuable.

Brody [00:35:12] This is probably a hard question, but I think you can do it.

Neil [00:35:18] (laughs) I'll try.

Brody [00:35:18] I've noticed with your experience interviewing some of the most successful people in everything, like business, politics, music. Elon Musk obviously was one of the biggest, Gavin Newsom recently.

Neil [00:35:28] Right.

Brody [00:35:28] And is there anything, a pattern that you've noticed maybe, that you think you can say: this is one of the things that it takes to be great?



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Neil [00:35:37] Yeah and see a pattern. Let's see, I think. I think there are a few things I think if there's a pattern, one of the biggest ones is not being discouraged by failures. Politicians lose elections. If you lose one election, and you never run again, well, that's going to be hard. If you have one setback and you think I'm not good at that. So, I think I think there's one simple thing. And I and by the way, I've studied this. I've literally studied this.

Brody [00:36:06] ok.

Neil [00:36:06] And there are people we put on pedestals and we think that they're perfect, with any hero of the culture. But I went back and studied everyone we put on a pedestal, and look for all their doubts and their insecurities, and they all have them. But your belief that you can do it, needs to be slightly greater than your fear that you can't. In other words, we live in the self-improvement culture that thinks we have to stamp out all low self-esteem and be confident, get rid of all our fears, get rid of all our insecurities, because people are kind of preaching this to us. But all that has to be is your...self... your insecurities have to be forty nine percent, and your confidence has to be fifty one percent. You just have to reduce it enough so that you... yes, I'm scared and I'm going to try it. Yes, I'm afraid I'm going to fail, but let's see what happens. Yes. Afraid of being criticized for this, but I believe in it, and I'm going to just try to survive it or handle it if I if I don't. Or I'm going to hope for the best.

[00:37:01] So it's just like having a belief in yourself or a belief in your work or your project, your goals, your ambitions, your company or whatever it is that's just slightly greater, than your doubts. Just by one percent. And that's all it takes.

[00:37:17] There are people probably who could have changed the world, and they were too afraid of public criticism. They were too afraid of failure. They were too afraid of social disapproval. They were too afraid of not living up to the greatness that exists in their own head for themselves, that they didn't do it. There are a lot of people who've grown up in a family where they're the hero, they're the greatest. You're awesome. And they're fed so much of that that they are afraid to put a project out or take a risk in the real world in case it doesn't correspond to the ego image they hold on it themselves. And that would be the only thing.

Brody [00:37:55] It's like what a lot of people call failure of success. Right. They just have this vision of themselves that they're good and they don't want to be bad. So, they don't try to be great.

Neil [00:38:07] Right. Yeah. Because if you never risk anything, you never fail, and you can stay comfortable. Like, I think staying comfortable is something to try to avoid.

Brody [00:38:16] I mean, if you're always uncomfortable, you're always in the zone.



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Neil [00:38:19] Yeah, exactly. Exactly. So, it's good to get it's good to get out. It's good to really, really say, well, what are the what are the real actual risks here, and what can I can I survive them if you can. Go for it.

Brody [00:38:33] This isn't very much related, but is there a way that you motivate yourself? For you, it's writing, but is there a way you motivate yourself to do what you do?

Brody [00:38:40] I mean, I guess the answer is I love doing I love doing what I'm doing. And the challenge to me is the distractions. The challenge to me is time management and then attention management, which is two different things. One is sitting down to do the work, and then the other thing, is all the other things that are on our computers and phones competing for our attention. So, I'm motivated because I like I'm really excited about what I'm doing. It also helps to have an external deadline, such as a publisher, an editor, a producer who says this has to be in now. So, it helps to have somebody breathing down your neck, just like in school. It's like, well, the exam is on that day. So, if you don't, you really you can save all your stuff to the last minute, but you still got to get it done. So external deadlines. Enjoying what you're doing, even if you don't enjoy it all the time, knowing it's worth it. And then I'd say the third thing is there are a couple of things I use for attention management. One is called the Kitchen Safe, which is made for dieters. And I've talked about it a lot, but I'll take my phone. I'll drop it in a time safe. Screw it on three hours and my phone's gone.

[00:39:43] And then on the computer, a program called Freedom, where I'll shut off the Internet for the amount of time I'm working. And if there's searches, I have to do, I'll make a list of it and do it when the computer pops on. But for sure, those things like. They are probably like the greatest productivity hacks.

Brody [00:39:59] Yeah, I noticed in my research that you did this thing where I'm not sure if you still do it, where you make, you get someone else to order your lunch for you and prepare your lunch just to avoid making the decision or the distraction. And I'm curious if that's something you still do and if there's any other really what most people think of as weird things that you do to avoid distraction.

Neil [00:40:23] Yeah. Yeah, I don't do it. I mean during COVID, COVID's kind of changed everything. So, I've learned to sort of enjoy cooking and some of those routes and I've learned to find pleasure in some of the maintenance things that I previously avoided. But the simple answer is, I really want to want to be productive with my time, and I know and I love writing. And the more books that I can share before I leave, the better. So, I try to outsource anything that's going to take time or decision making.

[00:40:52] So the simple, simple version of this is that I noticed when I would work in a work environment, there'd be a moment when it's "What are we having for lunch?" They pass all the menus around. They debate it, they'd look over it. They'd circled these things. And I just said, wow, that's a lot of energy and time we're putting into that. Because if you read the book, I think it's Willpower. It talks about how we have a certain amount of decision-making capability each day and then we're just fried. And a lot of that goes into



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what am I wearing and what I'm eating for four for lunch or dinner. So, I just thought, why don't I just find, figure out my seven favorite meals, just have them just show up each day. And I recently was in a in a writer's room for a TV show. And I just said, hey, I'm going to choose my five favorite restaurants for these days and I'll just get that automatically delivered. And they all everyone else insisted on doing the menu thing, and like then that's this person's day to choose and they're just going through it. And it literally would take 20 minutes. And I'm here just doing other stuff because it's automated. So, I think that's one thing. I have a lot of them. So that's one thing I do.

[00:41:58] Second thing I do is that I batch , try to batch things. So, for example. I mean, how many friends do you think would you say you have like a rough estimate of friends and acquaintances?

Brody [00:42:14] Five.

Neil [00:42:15] Five, five. Good. That's awesome. Probably if I had estimated it would be hundreds of friends and acquaintances.

Brody [00:42:21] Depends on what you mean by friends [dog barks in the background]

Neil [00:42:23] Yah, yah, Probably close friends. You're right. I've got like maybe 10. But let's just say let's see if your five close friends, are they all friends with each other, or no?

Brody [00:42:29] Like four of them are.

Neil [00:42:32] Cool. That's awesome. So, it's a nice group. You can just hang out with that group. And then so for me, I have a bunch of different friends and a bunch of from a bunch of different worlds and a bunch of different social requests. And I could go out every night for a month and everyone still would be happy to feel like that enough time.

[00:42:47] So I created a weekly dinner party and at that dinner party, whatever friends want to see me, you know, can come. New people who seem interesting to me can come, maybe a business person wants a meeting, but I'm like, that may not be worth me setting a half an hour aside, just to talk that one person, can come. And also, they get to meet and connect with each other and it's really nice. So, I think the idea behind all of these things is being proactive instead of reactive. Instead of reacting to every request that comes in, someone says, "Oh, hey, I'm in town, I'd love to see you", I'm like, "Cool. Come to the Tuesday night dinner party". Right?

Brody [00:43:20] Yeah.

Neil [00:43:21] So I sort of try to batch the social stuff. And lastly, I do this with emails that - if you email me, it doesn't go to me. It goes to someone else and they'll make a list of all the questions - they'll answer what they can and then make a list of all the questions. And then at 5:00 pm, either it's a phone call or email each day and we'll just say, here's all the questions and emails and say, here's my responses. And then it's done. And again, I think



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whoever you are, you have work to do in the world. That's, whether you know it or not, at this moment, you have a gift to give to the world, in some way. Right? And it doesn't have to be the ways that seem obvious, like writing or music or entrepreneurship. It may there may just may be in your way of being and being an amazing person, maybe. Who knows. But everybody has a gift to give the world. And I think if you spend your life in reactivity and people pleasing - I've got respond all these texts, I got to respond to all these DM's. I got to make sure that I'm current on all the news. And all these all these devices that are using AI to take our time to support a business model. Right? Devices use AI to take your time to support different business models and you're just being used like a cog in the machine, for someone else's profits. So, you want to spend your life as a resource and a people pleaser, or do you want to give your gift to the world? And I really think, everyone has to have one doesn't have to do anything, but it's probably valuable or helpful to make sure that are proactive and not a reactive life.

Brody [00:44:52] The last question I want to ask you, and it will be either the hardest or the easiest question today is what is success to you?

Neil [00:45:01] Yeah, great question man. I think success. Success is going to bed happy at the end of the day. I think success is like going to bed with, like a smile on your face and being like - that was that was a good day. And the more of those days, you can have, that's success.

[00:45:19] Success is not competing for real world medals, honors and numbers because you can't hold on to those. Right? Success is really feeling good about that. And as you said, did I act asking yourself this question as I try to ask them every night, did I act within my values and was I always, I use the term "adult functional". Like in other words, did I have... we can act as a wounded child, which means we're incredibly like children, or what's called adaptive adolescent, which is almost like angry at the world and reactive. Or as a functional, healthy adult. And looking back on the day as I did, I operate within my own value system and code. Did I - was I a functional adult throughout the day. You know, am I doing things that are supportive? Was I proactive or reactive in what I did? And then I try to examine and look at it and figure out if there's something I need to change to make things work better.

[00:46:21] But I think that success is success is like living up to your own standards for yourself and being happy at the end of the day. Like I was talking to somebody, about as a father, it's like, well, don't you think that all the trauma you experienced is what made you so successful? And don't you want what your child to experience some trauma so they're successful. And I'm like, I'd rather be like... happy. And not live up to the world of success, if he's... I've seen so many people writing for Rolling Stone, some of the richest, most famous people in the world. Miserable, just miserable. Like so stressed out and so anxious and so unhappy and still clawing for more.

[00:47:06] I'll close with this question, with this thought. I was talking to one such person. And they said they spent their whole life clawing for success. If they were ever unhappy or depressed, they thought, well, I'm just not there yet. And then one day they got there. They



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got to the top of the mountain. They got, they're a household name now. And they're seeing and rewarded as being the very best of what they do. They got there. And when the depression didn't go away and they couldn't say, I'm just unhappy because I don't have it yet, they had to start taking a real look at themselves and realizing that, it's still there. And what I learned from that, and from all the people I talk to, if there's one lesson from them, is that fame and fortune, success and fortune won't fix anything. They'll only amplify what's already wrong with you.

Brody [00:47:56] I didn't realize that last part and we're like, I'm sure we've all heard. Money doesn't fix all your problems, but I didn't realize it amplifies them.

Neil [00:48:03] Yeah, because then you've got it and now, I've got to hold onto it. But the anxiety of what now I've got this giant overhead to support. Now I've got these people want to take it. Now I'm getting sued to that target. Like the goal, and I think we said that word capacity, like the goal is just to me - one thing I want to if I want to teach my son and continue to teach myself is to build my capacity to raise my capacity for what I can handle.

[00:48:26] [Music up, then down for]

Brody [00:48:27] That was Neil Strauss, an absolutely incredible guy. If you want more of him, please consider visiting NeilStrauss.com or buying one of his many incredible books.

[00:48:39] Thank you for listening to this episode of Titans as Teens. If you want to learn more about Titans as Teens, please visit TitansAsTeens.com. Thanks again for listening.

[00:48:47] [music up and ends cold]