

Paul: [00:00:00](#) Ladies and gentleman, angry Americans worldwide, we have an incredible guest today, absolutely incredible, one of the people I have been most looking forward to talking to since I created the show before I even had a show. The great and powerful Aaron Mankin is in the Classic Car Club New York. Welcome my friend.

Aaron Mankin: [00:00:20](#) Love it. Thanks for having me. Thanks for having me out here. Yeah, this is great.

Paul: [00:00:23](#) Yeah, what do you think of this place?

Aaron Mankin: [00:00:24](#) Oh phenomenal, top shelf. This is beautiful [crosstalk 00:00:29], yeah.

Paul: [00:00:29](#) Top shelf. Now I said you're the great Erin Mankin. You're also the good Erin Mankin. Really. I mean you're a good person, and every time I'm around you I feel happier. I think anyone listening to this discussion today is going to feel happier. How do you do that, man? How do you do that? Is it just natural? Were you born that way? I got to ask you. I know I'm kicking it off with a touch one, but like ...

Aaron Mankin: [00:00:53](#) No, I think anyone who's survived adversity, has been through something has a unique perspective on not just their life but life in general and which direction you go in understanding that it is what you make it and the power you have to make one choice over another. And that's where my recovery really started was not letting some guy who picked up a shovel buried a bomb and tried to take my life dictate who I'm going to be for the rest of my life. That's a choice I get to make.

Paul: [00:01:26](#) Excellent. A choice you also get to make on Angry Americans is what cocktail you prefer, so tell folks what you've chosen and why.

Aaron Mankin: [00:01:35](#) Well, what we have [inaudible 00:01:37] is some Blanton's. Blanton's is just beautiful on the rocks, straight up you don't want to ... You've got to enjoy all the layers. I was just turned onto it about a year, two years ago. I had some family bring a bottle and get a super rare, hard to find, [inaudible 00:01:57] nowhere. And we polished it off and just had a great time.

Paul: [00:02:01](#) You know a little bit about the brown liquor. You actually said your drink of choice is Crown ... You tell the folks here.

Aaron Mankin: [00:02:09](#) We call it VCR, vanilla Crown Royal. It's Sprite. And you would never put those two together. I'll tell you it's magical. It's

dangerous is what it is. It's magical. Of course Marines know a little bit about drinking, and we were founded in a bar, so it's kind of our thing, part of that culture. But when it comes or it's in certain places or times it's patriotic to buy me a beer or get me a drink, then embrace that.

Paul: [00:02:43](#) I don't know if there's anyone who's been given more free drinks in the world maybe than Aaron Mankin. I think it's a testament to your fortitude that you're not a complete alcoholic. I mean I honest to God like everywhere ... Have you paid for a drink in 10 years? Maybe you've insisted on paying for it yourself.

Aaron Mankin: [00:03:00](#) I try and pass it on. I get people they'll want to pick up a check or buy my meal. Hell, when I was at the burn unit I'd have Americans come up and say, "I just had a gastric bypass. I've got all this extra skin. Could you use it? Could I give you the skin off my back?"

Paul: [00:03:22](#) Literally.

Aaron Mankin: [00:03:23](#) Yeah, yeah, just whatever they could do and give. It's been incredible to see great Americans just do whatever they can.

Paul: [00:03:33](#) I want to get to your story, which I think is now the stuff of legend, but you handed me your business card, which is pretty fucking cool. It says, "Aaron P. Mankin," and on top it says, "APM." Which is kind of like, it looks like B-I-G-A-O-C like you've got the three letters in a very strong way with four stars. You're a Corporal, but you promoted yourself to four stars, so I appreciate that. And it says, "Advocate, patriot, Marine." And I think that that really embodies who you are. And then on the back it's got the longer explanation, United States Marine Corps Combat Correspondent, Purple Heart recipient, congressional military and veteran liaison, UCLA Operation Men Board of Advisors, Sheepdog Impact Assistance Board of Advisors, keynote, and then maybe what I want to pivot off of, your e-mail that I think you've had for as long as I've known you, which is scarsarenotforever @ something. I'm not going to tell them exactly your e-mail. But it's been scarsarenotforever for as long as I've known you. Can you talk about that last part and why you picked that and why it's kind of one of your mantras?

Aaron Mankin: [00:04:39](#) That was something I embraced very early on in my recovery back in 2005, waking up like my face was gone. I got my face blown off and didn't look like me and had to deal with a lot. I'd even take my arm, I'd raise my arm up, cover my face. All I could

see were my eyes. And I had my [inaudible 00:05:01], and I had my goggles on so my eyes weren't wounded. And I still can't look like myself or I could see myself again and had to remind myself that these scars are not forever and the faith that I had that I would get better. And it's become so much more than that when I meet people and I share my story or don't. I just meet someone for the first time, and they kind of begin to look past that. They may see the scars at first, but it's not all they see. There's more to it than that. Even if a brief moment in time we get a chance to connect and share stories. The scars may be what engage us or what gets a conversation started. But it's so much more. It's beyond that. So it may be where we start, but it's not where we end. We move on.

Paul: [00:05:53](#) And this is kind of the interesting part about Podcasting because folks are usually watching you on TV, and they see your face, and they see your wounds, and they see your scars, but on Podcast you can't see them. Now, we're going to have a video online at angryamericans.us, and you can see me and Aaron running around here drinking brown liquor and driving fancy cars. But I think your voice has become so strong over the years, man. And you and I first met ... I want to tell this story. Do you remember where we first met?

Aaron Mankin: [00:06:27](#) I know exactly where we were, right up the street.

Paul: [00:06:29](#) Yeah because you texted me on the way over here to the car club. You said it kind of feels like the first day we met, and it's not far from where we met. You want to tell the story or you want me?

Aaron Mankin: [00:06:39](#) We were both working some media on Veteran's Day. We were on the flight deck at the Intrepid doing I think doing, I think, Heidi Collins show or CNN. It was freezing.

Paul: [00:06:51](#) It was fucking cold as Hell.

Aaron Mankin: [00:06:53](#) It was so cold because of course we were out over the water, so there's no ... And we were just huddled up underneath a stairwell trying to find some cover from the relentless breeze.

Paul: [00:07:05](#) It's an old World War II aircraft carrier that we've done a lot of events on together, and they had set up CNN on the flight deck. And Veteran's Day is November 11. Sometimes, rarely, it's beautiful and sunny. Often it's cold and shitty. And this was especially cold. This was, like, frigid, wind going. And I don't think we had actually been introduced, but we were in this tiny,

tiny metal stairwell that feels like a submarine, just two dudes shoved into this little stairwell just shaking trying to get warm. I said, "Hey, what's your name? How you doing, buddy? Want to keep me from dying of frostbite?"

Aaron Mankin: [00:07:43](#) Yeah, because we both had the same idea like, "Hey, let's tuck in here while we're standing around." And finding out hearing your story and connecting with you. It's just been ... Yeah, man that first-

Paul: [00:07:57](#) You've risen to become an incredible voice for a lot of people beyond the veteran's community. You've transcended it. And I want to talk about your journey and the future because I think too often people want to hear what happened to you, and they don't want to hear enough about what you think. And I want to hear today about what you think and what you see because this show is about the precarious state of our American experiment, and it's about people who have shaped the past, the present, and the future. And it's about Americans who are what I call iconic, important, and inspiring. And you are all those things. I think that this is going to be one of those interviews where people who have never heard of Aaron Mankin before they're going to look back on this interview and remember this was the time they heard Aaron Mankin because you're not starting to go beyond the veteran's community, and I hope this show can be a part of that. You're our first person from Arkansas on this show.

Aaron Mankin: [00:08:53](#) Hey, there you go. Now you're legit, right?

Paul: [00:08:57](#) I said person from Arkansas because I asked you on the way in, and I want you to explain it, is it Arkansan? How do you refer to someone from Arkansas properly?

Aaron Mankin: [00:09:06](#) There's debate within the state. You've got some people that consider themselves Arkansans. Some people say, I don't know, [inaudible 00:09:15], like call me Kans nothing. I'm an Arkansawyer, right. And so it goes back and forth. I go either way.

Paul: [00:09:24](#) What are you teaching the kids? You've got two kids. They're now getting big. What do you teach them? Are they Arkansans?

Aaron Mankin: [00:09:33](#) I think it just depends on who you're talking to. It goes either way.

Paul: [00:09:36](#) So go back to, maybe tell people what was it like where you grew up, and why did you join the Marine Corps? And then

you've told this story a million times, but tell it to folks in the way you think they should know it.

Aaron Mankin: [00:09:53](#) There I was.

Paul: [00:09:53](#) Start with where you grew up.

Aaron Mankin: [00:09:56](#) I grew up in beautiful Northwest Arkansas, a city called Rogers. And in Rogers we're home of Walmart store number one. That's where Sam Walton got his start. Real big in the community there, home office and all that. Just a beautiful part of the state if you like being outdoors. Out in the Ozarks there it's just gorgeous. Growing up, did well in school, was always a decent student, enjoyed debate and competitive speech and school and meeting future press secretaries, debating.

Paul: [00:10:41](#) You did?

Aaron Mankin: [00:10:41](#) Huckabee was from Arkansas. She lost-

Paul: [00:10:44](#) Sarah Huckabee?

Aaron Mankin: [00:10:45](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:10:45](#) So you met her when you were growing up?

Aaron Mankin: [00:10:47](#) Oh yeah, we debated in the same competitions, right?

Paul: [00:10:52](#) Wow. Did you ever debate against Sarah Huckabee?

Aaron Mankin: [00:10:54](#) Oh yeah, oh yeah.

Paul: [00:10:55](#) How'd you do?

Aaron Mankin: [00:10:57](#) Beat her pretty good.

Paul: [00:10:58](#) I bet you did.

Aaron Mankin: [00:10:59](#) I see her up there still choking on her words like she used to.

Paul: [00:11:03](#) Wow. That's amazing. Okay, please continue.

Aaron Mankin: [00:11:06](#) I was successful at that, enjoyed doing that. After I got out of high school I went to college for a few years, 9/11 happens, the world changes, I feel like this is going to be my generation's war. I need to do something. This is 2003 when I enlisted. We had

sold a war that was righteous. Those of us that believe in, wow, exporting democracy, that's something we can get behind. Let's take this to the world and everything else with that. But I thought what can I do ... If I'm going to be in the military, what can I do that I do well? Because I wanted to bring something to the table. I didn't want to just be another pair of boots in the sand. I wanted to contribute or use my skills in a way, give that to my country. Decided to be a combat correspondent, so joined the Marine Corps 2003 and did my training and was forward deployed to Fallujah in 2005, telling stories, trying to make Marines look good, getting the news back home about what we were involved in, telling stories about getting Girl Scout cookies.

Aaron Mankin: [00:12:29](#) When Pope John Paul II died having a service there in Fallujah. Marines response to what else is going on in the world. And then of course the kinetic side of things, combat operations, hard knocks and was Operation Matador in early May in 2005 with a group of Marines from Lucky Lima Company 3/25. We did some house-to-house operations up near the Syrian border. We were at the time on the heels of al-Zarqawi who would later become father ISIS. So we were rushing through there, and sure enough I was done. I got all my evidence. I got everything I needed to come back and tell the story. I thought with what little time I have left I'm going to go catch a bird. I'm out of here. What little time I'll get some more re-roll, right, so I slide in another tape, tape 2005, right? Throw another tape in, start filming just our movement just over the terrain all our vehicles, and boom. Rolled over an IED, threw a 26 ton vehicle 10 feet in the air. The guys behind us said they could see the track in front of us.

Paul: [00:13:50](#) From underneath meaning it was so high in the air you could see underneath a 26 ton vehicle.

Aaron Mankin: [00:13:54](#) Exactly.

Paul: [00:13:55](#) Wow.

Aaron Mankin: [00:13:56](#) Exactly. And boom. I was standing up in the vehicle. I was exposed from the chest up, so I caught some of the initial blast, but I was so far toward the back of the vehicle that I just got thrown back inside. It was like somebody up ended their barbecue and just threw hot coals on me, and it was all raining down, and I see flashes of orange and then of course the panic sets in, everything sets in. I just gasped, just, "I've got to get out." By then one of our sergeants had muscled open a little

hatch there, and the sunlight trickled in. I got my target, and I just dove out, hit the deck, rolled around for a while. My sleeves had caught fire, my face was on fire, and I rolled, rolled, rolled, check, stop, no still on fire, roll, roll, roll. And I exhausted myself trying to extinguish myself. And I laid there and thought this was it.

Aaron Mankin: [00:15:01](#) And you know how they said your whole life flashes before your eyes. For me, ironically enough, being a photographer I just saw these pictures, these images, these iconic images in my life of my family and friends, people worth fighting for, worth dying for. And just this peace came over me. I woke up to the sound of my fellow Marines yell, "Put him out. Put him out." They run over, and they're diving on me. They put the flames out, and I kind of snapped to. I kind of stand up. I wasn't wounded from the waist down. I thought I'm okay, right, shucks, ain't nothing. I've got to get back to my gear. I've got to go get my mission, go tell the story. And on my way back to this inferno that I just narrowly escaped Doc grabs me by the collar, corpsman grabs me and says, "You're hurt. You need to come with me." And that lesson right there teaches me a lot. I share that with people.

Aaron Mankin: [00:15:59](#) Sometimes you don't know how hurt you are in the moment, and it takes someone else to come up and say, "I've got you. Come with me. I'm going to take care of you." And I've witnessed that over and over my experience and this face since then going on 14 years now. So second and third-degree burns from fingertips to shoulder blades. My flight jacket saved my core. And then my face, my nose was burned, my ears were burned, scar contractures around my mouth were so tight my mom had to feed me out of a funnel for weeks just to get food in me. And it's been, what, gosh, nearly 70 surgeries all together.

Paul: [00:16:55](#) 70 ... And I've seen you kind of every couple of months since then, and your face has literally been reconstructed, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:17:06](#) It's beautiful.

Paul: [00:17:07](#) It is. I mean I will tell you, brother, because I love you. I think it's more beautiful than any other face I've ever seen because-

Aaron Mankin: [00:17:14](#) You need to zoom in on this? Is there a zoom?

Paul: [00:17:16](#) This is no shit because the work that went into it. I mean, the amount of pain you've had to endure to have a face is

unimaginable. Just for a moment of levity tell folks the story of when you and I were at the Playboy Mansion. There we were. We were taking off for him.

Aaron Mankin: [00:17:39](#) There I was at the Playboy Mansion.

Paul: [00:17:41](#) We've been on some weird experiences together.

Aaron Mankin: [00:17:44](#) It's crazy.

Paul: [00:17:44](#) You had a much more Forrest Gump kind of experience over the last 10 years than I have, but occasionally they've intersected, and at one point we ended up at a fundraiser at Hugh Hefner's Playboy Mansion in Los Angeles. And you are a funny mother fucker. I think it's important, I've known a lot of folks who've been pretty severely wounded, and what I've found is that what it can do is magnify what's inside of you.

Aaron Mankin: [00:18:13](#) That's true [crosstalk 00:18:14].

Paul: [00:18:14](#) You were always just-

Aaron Mankin: [00:18:15](#) You learn that in the burn unit. If you were an asshole before you're going to be a burned asshole. It's not going to make you a better person.

Paul: [00:18:22](#) That's right, that's right. And if you were charismatic and you were funny it's magnified, and it's intensified, and it's in some ways kind of calcified. But tell the Playboy Mansion story.

Aaron Mankin: [00:18:34](#) So there I was at the Playboy Mansion, right, doing ... We were with [inaudible 00:18:38], their 55th fundraiser, and that year they were honoring Hef as Mr. Wonderful and got a lot of old, just a lot of Hollywood in the tent outside is right outside the mansion. Huge party with Slash who was on guitar, and Sugar Ray I think was there, who else, comedians. It was just, it was a party. It was crazy. And that evening they were benefiting Operation Mend. You want to talk about gold standard, you want to talk about excellence, you want to talk about doing it right or saying thanks, I'll talk more about that later, but Operation Mend is a group at UCLA Medical Center that does facial reconstructions. There's a lot of heavy lifting for the guys and gals who come back that ... You think about losing an arm or losing a leg.

Aaron Mankin: [00:19:38](#) You never think about losing your face or giving your face for your country. And Operation Mend stepped up and filled a void

that was needed. So [inaudible 00:19:50] are going to do this big fundraiser for Operation Mend, so they shared the video. It's powerful. You hear from these warriors that had given up so much even on themselves in a lot of ways or finally accepted the way that they looked. I'm okay with that, so anything [inaudible 00:20:07] just better. I can maybe see the light come back in their eyes. You look at the pictures online at the Operation Mend website, and it's powerful. It's powerful. So they show the video, and the room's kind of heavy, and I jump up. I'm in my dress blues, right, medals dangling, looking good. They hand me a mic, and I just want to say thank you to let them know what you're doing here matters. Thank you for your support.

Aaron Mankin: [00:20:38](#) And at the end I turned to Hef sitting right up front right there, and I thanked Hef. I said, "Hef, I just want to thank you for letting a couple Marines come and have their way at your place and have their way at the bar. We're having a really good time. And I'm just surprised at how comfortable I am here being surrounded by so many people who have had as much plastic surgery as I have." And the place lost it. Standing ovation, "Yay, yay." I didn't know what to do. I was like, "Thank you and goodnight."

Paul: [00:21:11](#) That was it.

Aaron Mankin: [00:21:12](#) I left, yeah.

Paul: [00:21:13](#) A front row filled with Playboy playmates of all generations, some who are decades past when they were playmates, and it was Hollywood. There was more plastic surgery in one room between Operation Mend and Playboy playmates than maybe any other location in American history, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:21:31](#) Crazy.

Paul: [00:21:31](#) It was crazy.

Aaron Mankin: [00:21:33](#) I can't say that. I don't know when I'll ever get to use that linea gain. I've got to say it. I've got to say it.

Paul: [00:21:39](#) That's why I wanted you to tell that story, man. The first time I went to Operation Mend I went on a tour, and it's this incredible project at UCLA Medical, which is one of the most innovative medical centers in the world. It was led by a Vietnam veteran and founded by the Katz', Ron Katz, the great philanthropist and patriot. And on a very basic level they had

been doing plastic surgeries. They had been doing boob jobs and face lifts. And I heard Dr. Miller, right Dr. Miller?

Aaron Mankin: [00:22:09](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:22:09](#) ... tell the story. You know he was a Vietnam veteran, and he had been-

Aaron Mankin: [00:22:12](#) Right, bronze star recipient.

Paul: [00:22:14](#) And he had been doing boob jobs and face lifts, and the war was happening, and guys like you didn't have a face. And he said, "Boy, I have a skillset, and I can apply it to these men and women coming home."

Aaron Mankin: [00:22:25](#) We came home with that need.

Paul: [00:22:28](#) Because the Army didn't finish the job. They would explain this. They would get you good enough to live but not good enough to be able to open your mouth wide enough to eat a hamburger.

Aaron Mankin: [00:22:38](#) Functionality.

Paul: [00:22:39](#) Functionality, right, or to be able to ... Octavio Sanchez, one of our friends and dear colleagues, an incredible human being, he said he just wanted to be able to pick his kids up at soccer and not have the other kids make fun of his dad, like things that I think other people take for ... Being able to close your eyelids. So many different things that I think people take for granted. But the innovation ...

PART 1 OF 3 ENDS [00:23:04]

Paul: [00:23:00](#) ... Things that I think people take for granted. But the innovation is what blew my mind. That when I was there, they were doing hand transplants, right? Which are now-

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:10](#) Yeah. Like Frankenstein.

Paul: [00:23:10](#) Right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:11](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:23:12](#) Legitimate-

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:12](#) Kodi's already out there. He's a magician.

Paul: [00:23:14](#) Dr. Azari, I hope, will join us at some point on the show. And they were doing penis implants. They were doing penile reconstruction, which was important because people don't understand how many people got blown up below the waist.

Paul: [00:23:28](#) I was reading, I think it was just a few weeks ago at Johns Hopkins, they completed the first successful penis transplant.

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:36](#) Penile transplant. Yeah.

Paul: [00:23:37](#) Penile transplant.

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:39](#) I mean, that's-

Paul: [00:23:41](#) It is truly sci-fi.

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:43](#) It is.

Paul: [00:23:43](#) I watched them take skin from an arm and the veins from an arm, and reconstruct and fashion a penis. They had been doing trans ops as well, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:23:55](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:23:55](#) For people going through trans surgery, just to see this connection and this rallying, and every time you guys came to UCLA, you'd kind of go out in LA.

Paul: [00:24:07](#) Melanie Gideon, who was one of the most incredible patriots we've ever seen. She ran Operation Mend for a long time. She was the boots on the ground. She would pick every one of you up. And you would go through this weird situation where you go to a surgery, right? You come out of Arkansas, and then you sit courtside at a Lakers game with Jack Nicholson. Right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:24:24](#) Yeah, crazy.

Paul: [00:24:25](#) So what was that like, man, to go through those worlds? And on some levels, man, to be defined, to have so much of your life defined by that moment, and that injury, and to... Frankly, don't you get sick of telling the story?

Aaron Mankin: [00:24:46](#) No, I don't because it's... That's-

Paul: [00:24:47](#) I know it's painful. I know every time you tell it, on some levels, it's painful. And you're giving... I want to thank you for sharing

the story, because Bob Kerrey told me every time a Medal of Honor recipient tells a story, it hurts. And you're pulling it out of you and sharing it. So I want to thank you for that, but also give you a chance to explain what you think about that question.

Aaron Mankin: [00:25:06](#) Thank you. Operation Mend was birthed out of, again, this need for facial reconstructions. Because the system that we were placed in, at Brooke Army Medical Center, was just not equipped to handle what we needed, right? They had surgeons, but these surgeons weren't board certified plastic surgeons. So yeah, Operation Mend stepped up and found a need, filled the need. And-

Paul: [00:25:35](#) But you don't get tired of telling that story.

Aaron Mankin: [00:25:37](#) That story... Because there are so many elements to that story.

Paul: [00:25:42](#) The story of getting hurt, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:25:42](#) Of the event?

Paul: [00:25:42](#) Yeah.

Aaron Mankin: [00:25:43](#) Of the incident? No. For one, I was a trained storyteller. I was there to tell a story. I didn't want to be the story. I became the story. So what do you do with that? I'm going to keep telling my story. And I know, I've seen it. I've seen the benefits of just sharing with someone. Or just being real. Just saying, "I struggle. I hurt too," right? Or they see my scars. They're already to that point. They want to know more about it. They want to engage. So there's a chance to educate there. Right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:26:17](#) I was a substitute teacher before I listed in the Marine Corps. And always thought I'd use the Corps to get back into the classroom. And here, I've been given a story, I've been given a platform. I've been given opportunities to continue to share that story, to educate other people about not just our experiences, but in sharing those stories, giving other people... Then they want to reciprocate. They feel like, "Okay, it's okay to tell my story."

Aaron Mankin: [00:26:47](#) Yes, it hurts every time I tell it, right? We gave six Marines that day. Some fathers, all sons. I'll never forget them, right? They're with me always. In sharing that, they're always alive.

Aaron Mankin: [00:27:05](#) A lot of time around this time of year, we you want to say thank you. They want to do something. They want to find out, "How

do you do that? How do you do that?" You're asking yourself, "How do you say that? How do you do a sacrifice so sacred? How do you say thank you to that?" The answer is simple. You live a life worthy of such a sacrifice, and to embody those beliefs, those core values that we all have as Americans, right? And coalesce, come together. There's healing in sharing, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:27:47](#) And knowing you're not alone, right? I didn't do anything by myself, right? Especially not in the Marine Corps. Yeah, I didn't go anywhere, do anything on my own, right? So to come home and almost be expected to, "All right, you've got this," right? Not me, personally, but others, right? "Good luck out there." It's just so just the opposite of who we are.

Paul: [00:28:14](#) I think anyone listening to this conversation is now going to understand why if you decide to run for office-

Aaron Mankin: [00:28:21](#) Me? No.

Paul: [00:28:22](#) Yes. That I may have to shut down this podcast, and a lot of folks may have to leave their jobs and go down to Arkansas or wherever you go.

Aaron Mankin: [00:28:29](#) I don't want that job.

Paul: [00:28:31](#) No, I mean it, man, because you've been a rising star for so many years. I think there's this wave, a small number, you're very unique, but a small number of, especially veterans, but not only veterans who've been through some really tough shit, and have come out on the other side, and have not gone into politics, right? You very easily could have run for office. You could have gone into Congress. It's almost an easy route. And I hope that people will continue to try to recruit you for more leadership positions. But you've done a different kind of work in that it's just been a grind, man. You're on so many planes, and in so many classrooms, and on so many local TV shows. I mean, I've done a lot of interviews, man, but do you have any idea how many you've done over the last decade?

Aaron Mankin: [00:29:18](#) No. No, no.

Paul: [00:29:20](#) No.

Aaron Mankin: [00:29:20](#) No count on it.

Paul: [00:29:21](#) And our friend, Willie Geist, was the first ever guest on this show.

Aaron Mankin: [00:29:25](#) Willie.

Paul: [00:29:26](#) He's been a tremendous advocate for Operation Mend.

Aaron Mankin: [00:29:28](#) I spoke to Willie last night. He came out to celebrate with us and continue to support Operation Mend. He's on our board of advisors there. He and his wife, Christina, and their kids, they're beautiful people.

Paul: [00:29:40](#) They're great human beings.

Aaron Mankin: [00:29:42](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:29:42](#) We earlier said that maybe Willie can run on a ticket with Wes Moore, but he might maybe run on a ticket with you. And then you'll lock up the South too-

Aaron Mankin: [00:29:50](#) I'll tell you-

Paul: [00:29:50](#) ... which will be... Sarah Huckabee be shaking in her shoes if you ran. So going back to Arkansas, I want to ask you a question I asked Willie. A question I ask everyone. Aaron Mankin, when you were growing up in the Ozarks, Aaron Mankin, what was your first car?

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:07](#) Oh, God. My first car was a sky blue, '91 Dodge Spirit.

Paul: [00:30:18](#) Really?

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:18](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:30:18](#) Yeah.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:20](#) Yeah, magical.

Paul: [00:30:21](#) Magical. Magical.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:23](#) Good times.

Paul: [00:30:24](#) Magical.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:25](#) Good times.

Paul: [00:30:26](#) Where did you get it? Do you remember where you got it?

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:28](#) From a neighbor down the street. A good deal. \$1,800 for a first car, and drove till the wheels fell off.

Paul: [00:30:35](#) Wow.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:36](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:30:36](#) Did you drive it to... You can't take your car to Marine Corps bootcamp, can you?

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:39](#) No.

Paul: [00:30:40](#) No.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:40](#) No, I was in a Jeep by then, but-

Paul: [00:30:42](#) You were in a Jeep.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:43](#) Yeah, my-

Paul: [00:30:44](#) Jeep's great.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:44](#) ... Grand Cherokees. I've been in a Jeep ever since.

Paul: [00:30:46](#) Really?

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:46](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:30:47](#) Excellent. What color was the interior of your first car, do you remember?

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:51](#) Well, that's sky blue on the outside, then kind of a darker blue on the inside.

Paul: [00:30:55](#) That's kind of smooth.

Aaron Mankin: [00:30:56](#) I wouldn't say that. The hub-

Paul: [00:30:58](#) Magical, is how you-

Aaron Mankin: [00:31:02](#) Right? The wheel covers, they didn't match. The paint was flaking off in other places. But man, the guy behind the wheel had it going on.

Paul: [00:31:13](#) Yeah, and he still does. He still does. So you've been through this mindbogglingly difficult journey. I want to ask you some

questions that folks can't see because I see it. What people can't see is your hand has been injured, and what they can hear is your lungs and your throat have been injured. So can you talk about that, and to whatever extent you're comfortable, where are you in this recovery? Or maybe you call it something different, but this journey that will never end, right? It will be probably for your whole life. But 70 surgeries.

- Aaron Mankin: [00:31:49](#) Yeah.
- Paul: [00:31:49](#) I'd see you sometimes the couple days afterwards.
- Aaron Mankin: [00:31:52](#) Rough.
- Paul: [00:31:53](#) Right? And it was not like little surgeries, it was like-
- Aaron Mankin: [00:31:55](#) No.
- Paul: [00:31:55](#) ... they were putting a nose on you, right?
- Aaron Mankin: [00:31:57](#) Well, that was 70 surgeries where I'd lay on the table. But there's hundreds of procedures in that, right? Because my philosophy was if you're going to knock me out and I'm going to be down, then do everything, right?
- Paul: [00:32:09](#) Yeah.
- Aaron Mankin: [00:32:09](#) Let's do it all. Right? While you're there. Yeah. But yeah, my hands scarred throughout. I had extremely limited range of motion in my left hand, which has now become my dominant hand. Because on my right hand, my thumb and index finger have been amputated. My middle and ring finger are affixed in a straight position. And then my pinky has a boutonniere scar contracture that kind of tucks it up a little bit. But I can fit it in my pocket. It's a little hypersensitive at times, but I've got plans to get back to Operation Mend and work with some hand surgeons to see if we can improve that. That's that striving for, "What do you need? What can we do for you now?" And that's-
- Paul: [00:32:58](#) And you have a way of holding the mic. You've held a mic enough that you know how to hold a mic in... Your dominant hand is facing me. Your less dominant hand has the mic kind of ratcheted between your fingers in a way that's really effective, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:33:13](#) Right. Well, I'm right-handed, but I had to learn how to not just do everything all over again, right? Walk, dress myself, take care of me. But then to learn to be left-handed on top of it, that was just a new normal. And over time, right? Doing little things, you get pretty good at it.

Paul: [00:33:28](#) And your lungs, and your throat, and your voice. We can hear it in your voice. Where are you-

Aaron Mankin: [00:33:33](#) Yeah. Those initial inhalation injuries, and then constant innovations, and that sort of thing. Create a lot of scar tissue. So I've had some surgeries to clean that up, try and get my voice to a more flexible, that sort of thing.

Aaron Mankin: [00:33:47](#) But yeah, I'm doing so many surgeries, healing up. My kids were young, and I didn't want them growing up in hospitals. So I took some time off and I thought, "I'll come back, heal up for awhile, and do some more surgeries." I mean, that was almost six years ago. Operation Mend's 12 now.

Paul: [00:34:09](#) Amazing.

Aaron Mankin: [00:34:11](#) To see that grow, to see-

Paul: [00:34:12](#) And you are literally the face of this program, right? As you've improved and grown stronger, this program has improved, and grown stronger, and gone national. And-

Aaron Mankin: [00:34:23](#) Well, we've learned a lot.

Paul: [00:34:25](#) Yeah.

Aaron Mankin: [00:34:25](#) We realized, very early on, we couldn't just focus on the scars you could see and not acknowledge the ones you can't. So the program ballooned into this all-encompassing care. We include caregivers, the support element for the warriors when they come in because we know how important that is. We can't bring them in, do what we need, and then send them home. And have their support element unaware of what we're doing. So having all that communication has been invaluable.

Aaron Mankin: [00:34:58](#) The element of Operation Mend that is... The surgeries and clinical side, if that's the heart of what Operation Mend does, the soul is the Buddy Family program. When we go out for surgeries, they pair us with a family in the community. So a family who volunteers to open their doors and have someone come in, and just be there. A phone call away if you need

anything, or get you away from the hospital if there's downtime. Take you out to dinner, or take your kids to Disneyland, or something to create a positive experience while you're there, and know that people care. To give that opportunity to any community is only going to enrich all the people involved. So it's been powerful to see.

Paul: [00:35:43](#) In some ways, it's kind of really perfect that it is right next to Hollywood, right? Because for the family and for the kids, it can be kind of a vacation. You can go to a Lakers game, you can go to the beach.

Aaron Mankin: [00:35:56](#) Yeah. I'm so glad dad's got surgery this week. Yeah.

Paul: [00:35:57](#) Amazing, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:35:57](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:35:57](#) You can go to the beach, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:36:00](#) Yeah.

Paul: [00:36:00](#) And you're in there getting cut up for the 70th time, and the kids are at the beach. But I mean it. If you had to go to, no offense, like a cold ass place in the Midwest or somewhere else that didn't have Disneyland down the street, it'd be a little bit trickier.

Paul: [00:36:16](#) I think what I've seen too is that it's a very patriotic community. I think California sometimes gets a bad rap in politics, but Southern California, in particular, has more post-9/11 veterans than anywhere else in the country.

Aaron Mankin: [00:36:28](#) Yeah, it does.

Paul: [00:36:28](#) From LA all the way down, especially in San Diego and South, tons of Marines, tons of retirees, tons of students.

Paul: [00:36:34](#) But Aaron, you've kept this incredibly positive attitude. I remember seeing you speak when you've literally had a hole in your throat, right? I've never seen... I mean, the shit that you pulled off, right, is unbelievable. The way you're able... You're such an incredibly dedicated storyteller and a performer, on some levels. Anybody who's been in front of a camera knows that there's an artistry to it and a performance to it. But your

ability to pull it off and make it look easy is spellbinding to me and so many others.

Paul: [00:37:05](#) But if anybody had a right to be angry, it would be you. This show is called Angry Americans. It's about what makes folks angry. A lot of things that make everyone angry, but also about turning that righteous anger into something positive. I don't know anybody who's done that better than you. But on a very basic level, we all get angry. So Aaron Mankin-

Aaron Mankin: [00:37:25](#) It's okay to be angry.

Paul: [00:37:26](#) Yeah. Aaron Mankin, what makes you angry?

Aaron Mankin: [00:37:33](#) That's a good question. It's a great question because I don't get angry often, or I don't spend a lot of time in the angry space. Try and either distract myself or move on to something else that's more positive.

Aaron Mankin: [00:37:48](#) But it's been a journey to come home very early on in the war, when the nation was still very excited to care and be involved with warriors or just military in general. A lot of momentum, right, in our community. At that time to come home and witness that, to board a plane and have some first-class passengers, some citizens say, "No, you sit here. You sit here. I'll go," right? Just give their seats or give any way they can. It's been incredible to see.

Aaron Mankin: [00:38:31](#) What makes me angry is how that's waned. How we see maybe the constant mirage. Now that we're in your face all the time. Now that we have a presence, right? Now that we've been lifted to here, and you see us more than maybe you did before. It's easier to kind of glance over. It's easier to look past or ignore it, when the need is just as great as it's always been.

Aaron Mankin: [00:39:06](#) I get angry when we forget ourselves. We have these events, we've got a day, a day to remember. Again, some people it's just routine, and they forget it. They forget themselves. Or they'll say thank you as an empty platitude. It stops there. It doesn't go anywhere, it doesn't do anything. It's no good. So empty platitudes make me angry. I'm tired of hearing thank you when it doesn't mean nothing, doesn't do nothing, doesn't help nobody. But we should be thankful. You should say thank you. Don't get me wrong. Say thank you, but it needs to be gratitude, right? Right, and that gratitude is action, right? Manifest.

Aaron Mankin: [00:39:54](#) There's sacrifice that makes us grateful, right? That gratitude calls us all to serve. In that service, regardless of where you find yourself, do something, right? If you don't fight there, if you don't go there, if you don't serve there, serve them. Serve those that do. But everyone should do something. That gratitude, right, makes us called to serve. In that service, we're united. In that service, that brings us together. That's our tribe, right? That's us being us, doing what we do. We forget where we came from and how we all got here. How our diversities, our strength, how E pluribus unum, from many, one, right? Because we have to. Lest we forget, right?

Paul: [00:40:48](#) Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Aaron Mankin: [00:40:48](#) From Kipling's poem. Lest we forget. That's a warning. That's a warning of the things to come. Of the doom of what we're trying to create if we forget. Lest we forget who we are. Who we are. Where we came from. What we do best. Why we're here. For when it matters most. It matters most for the next time. There's always us. There's always a them, right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:41:25](#) We've been creating veterans, service members since the birth of our nation. This is not a new thing. For us to continually be struggling to provide for the men and women we call heroes is unacceptable. It's unacceptable. I feel if more people who were aware, took the initiative to educate themselves. Go up, meet a warrior, shake their hand, say thank you, and ask them, ask, "What'd you survive?" Right? Give a chance to tell their story, right? Let's see. Yeah, lest we forget. Tell-

Paul: [00:42:01](#) Thank you, brother. Thank you for sharing.

Aaron Mankin: [00:42:02](#) I'll keep trying to remind us, right? I feel like part of that's the burden of being a survivor from the battlefield. You have to carry a different burden, right? I didn't leave that or I didn't come home early and expect to be fighting a different war on the home front for years. Start on Capitol Hill, slapping senators, trying to effect positive change in policy. Yeah. Yeah, scream until my voice is gone, right? You hear me now? Right?

Paul: [00:42:36](#) You have been heard, I think. But it's starting to echo. You and I have been in the White House together. We've met with some of the most powerful people of all parties in Washington. There was a speech you gave when you accepted the IAVA Veterans Leadership Award that had elements of this answer you just had, where everyone stopped, everybody stopped. Folks who were just listening to that answer from you, maybe pulled over

their car, maybe put it on pause, maybe pulled the kids in the room and said, "You've got to hear this man speak." Because Aaron, you take people to church. You do. You take them to church in a way that is so powerful.

Paul: [00:43:20](#) We've been making veterans from the beginning, but veterans have also been coming home and continuing to serve, and that often includes politics. So I want to ask you about your future aspirations. Again, I think too often, people ask you what happened to you and not what you think. So I want to ask you, what do you think of the President and what do you think of this state of affairs in America right now? Far beyond veterans.

Aaron Mankin: [00:43:48](#) Yeah. Well, I grew up, my parents were always told that I would either... He's going to be a preacher or a politician. I'm humbled just to be a patriot. I don't want that job. I don't want to be a politician. I don't feel called to serve in that way. As far as the commander in chief. Even when I was in active duty and got sent to Iraq. Part of that service, part of that servitude, part of being a servant, you give up a lot, you give up a lot of freedoms that you have. Because at that point, right, being in Fallujah, trying to debate policy or execution at that point was... So you couldn't take yourself out of the picture and do your job. Do your mission, get home. And-

Paul: [00:44:58](#) But you're in it now. I appreciate you. I am inviting you to say what you think. I know you don't get a chance to do that. You may not want to. I respect that, if you don't want to get involved in the political debate.

Aaron Mankin: [00:45:13](#) Well-

Paul: [00:45:13](#) But I think you are a moral conscience for this country, at a time where we have a Commander in Chief who is testing the moral fabric of this country. I think regardless of people's political background, they see that. And people are divided, and it does come down to leadership.

Paul: [00:45:27](#) Every time you walk in a room here, and you set a positive tone, right? Which is what we need more of in government. And politics is getting nastier and, I think, infecting the tone across this country. If everybody woke up to a press conference from Aaron Mankin everyday, America would be a better place, right? We wake up to press conference with Sarah Sanders and Donald Trump. It's a crap shoot, man. And half the country is going to be pissed. But when you see him, what are your thoughts on him as a leader and...

Aaron Mankin: [00:46:01](#) My opinion on the President-

PART 2 OF 3 ENDS [00:46:04]

Aaron Mankin: [00:46:02](#) My opinion on the president is, well as a veteran, as a Marine who's been in this community for so long and seen so much selflessness, it epitomizes who we are. To have anyone at any level of leadership continually make it about themselves, does a great injustice to those who right now, all around the world, are making us proud. And they're not doing it for them, they're not doing it for him, right? And we have to remind ourselves again why we're here in this grand experiment that we have, and this little blip on the radar, this little moment in history, right? Because I've seen it, I've seen it, I was there. You know how we are unified. You know how we could galvanize, right? I hate, I hate to think that it's going to take another tragedy.

Aaron Mankin: [00:47:07](#) It's going to take something so terrible that we all suffer together. We all feel together and remember where we were and promise each other again not to forget. Again, not to forget and bring us together and move forward. And we've had good presidencies, we've had bad presidencies, but this community has continually looked out for each other, continually provided for each other. And I hear the static, I hear the noise, I hear the chatter over the airwaves. And all the attention he sucks out of the room because he demands it. He needs that to continually feed his machine. And by design, right? It's all by design. It makes me angry that at a time of Veteran's Day that we're not talking about veteran's issues, we're talking about the guy in the office, making it about him, and that's incredibly disappointing.

Paul: [00:48:13](#) So you were at the Veterans Day parade here in New York and he came. I chose not to go. I chose to boycott the event because I did not want to be politicized. You and I both know that at events like this, oftentimes a politician may grab you, you probably more than anybody, take a photo with you and politicize you, use you.

Aaron Mankin: [00:48:35](#) Oh yeah. I've had people steal my picture offline and you know, do it for this party or that party, just get used you know?

Paul: [00:48:44](#) And I did not want to do that. And so I chose a different route. I respect the folks that wanted to go, I respect the folks that didn't go. And that was my core issue, it's like everybody says, "Ah, he's a [inaudible 00:48:56] come." Well would you want to make your daughter's wedding right now? Or your son's wedding? Because think about all the complications that would

come with that. Think about all the people you have to explain it to, think about the folks who just won't come, think about the folks who would be excited. But it will make the wedding about him instead of about the bride and groom. And that's what I felt like happened at the parade. But you were there. How did you feel about him coming to the parade?

Aaron Mankin: [00:49:20](#) Ah, you know what? Just that it was different. Anytime you have the president on deck, it changes how things flow, how things work. It certainly didn't make anything easier. It didn't make anything better for anyone that was there. But my experience, when we got top side, [inaudible 00:00:49:47], you're walking through the streets and everyone there, they want to say thank you. They want to show their appreciation, they want to give you their love. He had no impact on that whatsoever right?

Aaron Mankin: [00:49:57](#) People need to say that and they did exactly that. So walking up Fifth Avenue like a boss with the Operation Mend crew, right? Beautiful day. Smiles on my kids' faces, right? Getting to experience that, getting to see people lining the streets, shaking their hand, welcoming people home. It was powerful, powerful day. And they put us right in front of the Marine Corps band, and they're playing the Marine Corps and they had to play our song, and every block! Every block they start over again. Five Marines, we've got to lock up, wait, wait. Stand at attention, set yourself-

Paul: [00:50:30](#) Wanted to be in front of Slash or somebody different, you heard the Marine Corps band song probably than any other human being on the planet who's not in the Marine Corps band. Aaron, a lot of the folks who listen to this show don't have a political home. They are unaffiliated, they are independent. I've seen, especially in the veterans community, but nationwide, they are a growing force. The fastest growing group that I see. People who don't want to be Republicans or Democrats or don't see a leader that they can run behind in Donald Trump or in Bernie Sanders.

Aaron Mankin: [00:51:03](#) The whole two party system is incredibly frustrating.

Paul: [00:51:03](#) So you and I've talked about this offline, but how do you identify yourself politically?

Aaron Mankin: [00:51:09](#) Politically, more of an independent. I haven't put labels on this or that. You know, I'd rather see policy. I'd rather see the person and judge their character. I remember we used to elect people based on character. Character counts, right? That's what makes

a leader a good leader. The characteristics that they have and a track record of executive decisions that proved successful, that had a longevity of success. I want that person to carry is into the future.

- Paul: [00:51:50](#) You are such a great guest to have because a lot of what the country is experiencing right now is pain. Pain.
- Aaron Mankin: [00:51:56](#) [inaudible 00:51:57].
- Paul: [00:51:57](#) And I think there's an attraction to Joe Biden in particular for some, because he can be a consoler in chief because he's dealt with the loss of his children, because he understands about pain. I think Obama was great about understanding and empathizing and communicating pain. George Bush was great about it at times, and Trump has consistently struggled with it. But you are an ambassador for helping people navigate pain in a very important way.
- Paul: [00:52:26](#) It's such a noble and important thing that you do in sharing your story and talking about it, but in those moments, maybe someone on a very... Not to dismiss it all, maybe someone was in a dentist chair. Maybe someone has to have a mastectomy, maybe a mastectomy. Maybe they're going through childbirth, maybe they're going through the loss of someone close to them. In those really deep moments of pain, how do you get through it? What do you do?
- Aaron Mankin: [00:52:54](#) Oh well, I had the benefit of having some really good medications, and then I go "Oh yeah I'm fine." Pain-wise right? Pain is temporary, pain is temporary. But the-
- Paul: [00:53:05](#) But for you, pain has been a constant, right? You have mental armor to deal with the level of pain that you've endured. I don't know if I've sat across a man who's endured as much pain as you have physically. And emotional, which is a part of it. And spiritual, it's all hard. So when that pain comes, what do you think, what goes through your head? What's your plan?
- Aaron Mankin: [00:53:30](#) Well, I talked to earlier, scars are not forever, right? And that ethos, that mentality, it takes courage. And courage is one of those, especially this time of year, the word gets thrown around courage. Courage is action again, right? You can be brave, but bravery in action is courage, and you cannot have courage without faith, without believing that this'll turn out well, this is going to be okay. And having that vision for yourself. And only you can make that choice, and that's it.

Aaron Mankin: [00:54:13](#) I think sometimes people just don't know how much power they have. When I travel, when I speak at schools, I teach our students about yeah, this happened to me. In your life, bombs are going to go off, something's going to happen and your life's going to say to you a in a totally different direction. And you may feel helpless and it's going to be hard, but trust me, know this, you're more powerful than you have yet to comprehend. Because you can make that choice, and you're the only one that can.

Paul: [00:54:48](#) Thank you. And I'm just going to keep saying thank you because at some point, it's just everything you do is a gift of knowledge and wisdom. And we have to be mindful of time and get you to a plane and get you home to your kids. But Aaron Mankin, what makes you happy?

Aaron Mankin: [00:55:07](#) What makes me happy? Well my kids, make me happy. Bringing up my kids, Madeline and Hunter. My girl Elise, her love and so forth, her boy Jackson. And my family, my support element, everyone I've got in my community that's since day one, since 5, 11, 2005 praying for me, lifting me up. Doing whatever they can to just stay engaged. That makes me happy. [inaudible 00:55:38] and PJ Clarke's last night surrounded by Operation Mend warriors and seeing them grow and their recovery and being around all these people that I've come to love and call my family. I had to sit there for a second, catch my breath. I'm really happy right now. I love seeing people come together and doing something they didn't know they could do, or didn't know if they could pull it off, but they tried and there was success. We learned something and we're all better for it.

Aaron Mankin: [00:56:23](#) And just, there's so many examples all around the country. All these organizations, all these groups put years under their belts and laser focusing their missions. So much room for people to get engaged, to find whatever you're into, whatever you like, whatever. Pick it. If your thing's, education, scholarships, grants, keep these warriors at the top of their game. You can contribute to that. If it's health and sciences, if it's completing something physical, I know a guy, [crosstalk 00:10: 59], guy. If it's equine therapy, whatever it is, there's no excuse to not to not serve. Zero.

Paul: [00:57:10](#) And you are a happy guy. And my favorite part, during Veteran's week it's grueling, it's tiring. We're out there, it's a lot of pain, it's a lot of-

Aaron Mankin: [00:57:18](#) This is the finish line over here, yeah.

Paul: [00:57:20](#) And it's exhilarating, right? But there's something, like at the end of it when you're going for a walk or you're at the bar or you're having the phone calls after when we get home, it's kind of like the day after the game. Because the game goes by and it kicks your ass and you kind of have to settle in and think about it afterward. But there is no more fun group of people to party with than the Operation Mend crew.

Aaron Mankin: [00:57:43](#) Shoot, oh yeah.

Paul: [00:57:44](#) And being around your crew. And it's a bunch of people who appreciate the shit out of life, right? Because every day is a gift. And I've been blessed to go to a lot of places in the world. One place I went to was Israel at one point and I was at a club late at night with a friend who took me there. And Tel Aviv was a great time, a great fucking time. And the parties were great and the music was great and people were happy. And it kind of surprised me. And my friend turned to me and said, "You know what? You'd party your ass off too if you thought you were going to die every day. If you thought a missile might land on your house."

Paul: [00:58:18](#) And it was a very basic element of that that I've seen in conflict zones and I've seen in war zones, what I've seen around people who've been through some shit. And you, and I got to give a shout out to [inaudible 00:58:30] and to Joey Paulk and so many others. You were the first man. In a very difficult thing, you were the first like bionic man. You were the first one to go through it, right? You've been through so many things, but the bravery and courage that you demonstrated around that was really important and inspiring. You also like football?

Aaron Mankin: [00:58:49](#) I do some football, yeah.

Paul: [00:58:50](#) We'll talk about some football, talk about some sports.

Aaron Mankin: [00:58:52](#) [crosstalk 00:58:52] game, you know?

Paul: [00:58:53](#) [crosstalk 00:58:53] state of affairs in football right now?

Aaron Mankin: [00:58:57](#) Not generally, no. So busy with other things. I've been distracted. I'm a ham and chees, I'm a Razorback fan and a Green Bay Packer fan. Ham and cheese, right?

Paul: [00:59:10](#) Did you make that up? That's great, did you just make that up? That's great.

Aaron Mankin: [00:59:12](#) That's who we are.

Paul: [00:59:15](#) Because if you're in Arkansas and [crosstalk 00:59:17].

Aaron Mankin: [00:59:16](#) Well if the Hogs win on Saturday and my Pack wins on Sunday, then daddy gets some ham and cheese. It makes me happy.

Paul: [00:59:23](#) I love it. I've never heard that before, you should coin that. That's a good t-shirt man. That's a very unique voting block for you. You can get together with Jake Wood from Wisconsin-

Aaron Mankin: [00:59:34](#) I love Jake.

Paul: [00:59:34](#) ...And the two of you together would be a formidable duo on any plane. But I do want to let you go. Anything else you want to share man? Floor is yours for a minute or two on anything that's on your mind. Not about that stuff, not about being wounded, I mean anything that's going on in the world that you want to just talk about or share about or...

Aaron Mankin: [00:59:55](#) Oh, free floor, right.

Paul: [01:00:00](#) Yeah man.

Aaron Mankin: [01:00:05](#) You talk about having a good time with the boys in Operation, having a good time with that crew, and there's something to be said about that. People who I think have suffered a lot, been able to pick themselves back up and to have that perspective and look forward to a good time because... I don't know if it just means a little more or if there's something a little richer about it, but tastes a little sweeter knowing that you still can celebrate. You still got good reasons out there to slap a smile on your face.

Aaron Mankin: [01:00:43](#) And things that just make you laugh. Things that other people might see trashy, and you find some humor or something. I tell a story about my son Hunter when he was about three years old. I'd come back from some operations in UCLA and outfitted me with these prosthetic ears, beautiful beautiful ears. Hand crafted, molded, hand painted, looked good. Hollywood prosthetic stuff. So I glue those on in the morning. So I'm there in the morning getting ready, going through my routine, putting my face on-

Paul: [01:01:17](#) Literally.

Aaron Mankin: [01:01:17](#) ..And my son comes in and hugs my neck, tells me good morning, I turned around to finish, when I do I notice my ears are gone. So now, I'm at the top of the stairs in my underwear, yelling at my three year old "You bring your daddy's ears back here right now! I know you heard me, you've got three ears. I know you heard me, get up here." Little things man, little things are huge sometimes. And having that perspective or having somebody in your life give you a little perspective, or a value that we've let slide away from us. So if I can be a part of that, I've always said, even before the [BC 01:02:06], before the Corps when I was young in school, they kind of ask early on, if you had a million dollars what would you do? Or if money was no option, what would you do? What would make you happy? And for me I always thought, "Man, if I could travel and speak, I think I'd love that." And here I am with a story to tell, and that's my passion. That's my passion. So if I keep doing that, if I get out there, if [inaudible 01:02:37] and politicians are making all the money, how much can a Patriot make to show up, tell some stories and try to educate a little bit.

Paul: [01:02:44](#) Well your stories and your wisdom and your inspiration are a gift, and are a gift to anyone who's listening right now. Anyone who's heard you before, anyone will hear you in the future. This is an interview I think people will go back and listen two years from now. You are a conscience, you are total fucking badass and a great inspiration. And I don't even know who's running for governor of Arkansas, but if you run you're going to crush him or her. And before, speaking of gifts, before I let you go, we have the giving of the gifts.

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:17](#) What is this?

Paul: [01:03:17](#) This is part of the show. You haven't listened enough, and I will-

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:21](#) It's not flammable is it?

Paul: [01:03:22](#) You have to go back and listen to Willy guys, because he almost went to the... I'll hold your mic.

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:25](#) Good, am I doing this?

Paul: [01:03:26](#) Yeah, hold on. He almost went to the Polish embassy by accident, which is a story that you can hear in episode one. But first off we got some schwag for you, some American man-

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:37](#) It's good quality too, people. He's not skimping on the t-shirts.

Paul: [01:03:39](#) Made in America by Oscar Mike, you know those guys?

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:42](#) I do.

Paul: [01:03:42](#) Yeah, knowing those guys in the Chicago area-

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:45](#) They're great.

Paul: [01:03:45](#) Oscar Mike, [inaudible 01:03:47] American's gear so you can enjoy that. And when you were having a crown vanilla and Sprite, I like how you just-

Aaron Mankin: [01:03:57](#) My peeps.

Paul: [01:03:58](#) Now we got your peeps here. [inaudible 01:04:00] peep story. My wife says maybe I should stop doing the peeps question, might be getting old, but it's always full of surprise. So here's the deal-

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:05](#) Tell her I said hello.

Paul: [01:04:06](#) I will.

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:07](#) Give her my love.

Paul: [01:04:07](#) She loves the hell out of you man.

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:08](#) Everyone loves, save some for yourself.

Paul: [01:04:10](#) I will. No no, the peeps are, this is the thing. So pull it out. Usually, we have yellow, blue and pink. But, someone stole our stash of yellow here at the Car Club, which is an issue for another time. Someone stole the yellow. So normally you get to choose, you're shoving them on your chest, which is amazing. Aaron Mankin if you had to choose a color, would you choose yellow, which is in absentia here, blue or pink?

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:36](#) Like reaching for a peep on the table [crosstalk 00:01:04:39].

Paul: [01:04:46](#) No no no, if you had to choose one of these.

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:48](#) I'll go with blue.

Paul: [01:04:48](#) Why?

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:48](#) It's pretty, which makes me feel pretty.

Paul: [01:04:48](#) There you go. It's pretty and it makes you feel pretty.

Aaron Mankin: [01:04:49](#) Yeah.

Paul: [01:04:49](#) You are pretty, I love it. I love it. I love it. And lastly, we've got something special for you. Our friends at Fort Hamilton Whisky made in New York, rye used to be made in New York. This just came out and hold on a second, I'm going to tell you what it is. Hold this. This is their new double barrel rye whiskey. And it's pretty bad ass. This is a blend of straight rye whiskeys, they call it double barrel. So it's pretty good, double barrel because you're your double barrel badass. And this just came out from our friends in Fort Hamilton Whiskey, big supporters of this show and of military and veterans everywhere.

Aaron Mankin: [01:05:24](#) Yeah thank you.

Paul: [01:05:24](#) And that's for you. You can enjoy it on the airplane or when someone steals your ears or anything else. But my brother, I love you. I'm so grateful for you. Every day I get out of bed I feel like it's a better world because you're in it doing good stuff. And for folks listening, watch Aaron Mankin, he's just getting started. And for me this transition has been fun because the gloves have kind of come off and now I can let my hands fly, and I know that that's starting to happen more with you. And this country needs you, this country loves you, but more important, it's fun to watch you rise, man. I'm grateful for your friendship and especially for being with me here today.

Aaron Mankin: [01:06:03](#) Thank you Paul.

Paul: [01:06:04](#) Ladies and gentlemen, the great Aaron Mankin. Vote for him, support him, follow him, hire him to come to your school or town. You can find him on the Operation Men website. I will post some photos of that as well, so you can see his incredible transition. He's going to take a Ferrari to the airport and fly back down Arkansas in time for the game. Ladies and gentlemen, the great and powerful Aaron Mankin live from the Classic Car Club Manhattan. Thanks for joining us.

PART 3 OF 3 ENDS [01:06:31]