

Lessons  Leaders

Lawyer X: A True Story

A CONVERSATION WITH
JAKE BANKS



Exclusive Summary: Lawyer X, Jake Banks, graduated from law school and became a prosecutor in Tarrant County, where he handled 45 trials. He won every single one except for the first. Suddenly, his life took a turn when he spent the next two years in solitary confinement in a French prison for smuggling drugs. After coming out, he wrote a book about his experience called "Lawyer X." This story is a candid conversation about bad decisions, redemption, and lessons learned.

The following conversation contains profane language and difficult topics.

Brian Beckcom: Jake, what the fuck were you thinking, dude? Seriously? What were you thinking, man?

Jake Banks: The only thing I was thinking about was money. That's it. The only thing I was thinking about was money, and this couldn't be a better story on how blind greed can make you do everything that I knew was wrong. To lie to all the people that I love. Just to take a promising career and put it in the crapper for dollar bills. That's what it was all about.

Who is Jake Banks?

Brian Beckcom: Well, Jake, I knew the general story about what happened to you in France, but I did not know the details of it, and it is absolutely scintillating. I'm reading the book, and thinking, 'Why isn't this a movie already?' I would watch the heck out of a movie like this. I want to talk a lot about your book, your experiences in France, and what it was like being in prison in a foreign country where you didn't speak the language.

One of the reasons I wanted to have you on the podcast, well first of all, you're a great dude and you've got a great story, man. But the other reason is that you have overcome some of the most difficult challenges a human being could possibly face, and I'm not just talking about the time in prison; I'm also talking about all the associated shame and the feeling of, 'Oh, I let my family down, and I let my friends down.' And you've overcome that. So I want to talk about that quite a bit. But before we do, why don't you tell everybody a little bit about where you come from, where you grew up, and a bit about your background so they can get to know you a bit better.

Jake Banks: Jacob Banks is my name, no middle name, born and raised in Dallas, Texas, fourth generation Dallasite, was president of my high school, starting leadership early. I think that's probably the only thing that got me into A&M, that fact, and that I wanted to join the Fight Texas Ag

Cadet Corps. I mean, I don't think I'd get into A&M now, but I wish I could say that going to prison was a one-off thing. That was such a shock to everybody, but the truth is, I got in trouble in high school, got arrested in high school, and did this in high school. It would always be a dichotomy of stop being such a wild ass and live up to your potential, so I'd get in trouble and then come back and do something good. Flip-flopping back and forth every time between what I know is right and just an instinct to be a wild ass and difficulty to get over or to drive through and get to A&M.

Cadet Corps was incredible. It really gave me a sense, maybe not of purpose, but being around a bunch of other dudes that I felt, these are my guys. These are people who are like me. They think like me. They act like me. In fact, I want to be like them. I look up to these guys because they don't have this desire to go out, and I need to pick up on these things. They're a good role model in this way. So I loved it, and these guys are still my best friends to this day.

Brian Beckcom: It's the same way for me, Jake. When I joined the Corps and I saw Jim Welsh as a fish drill team commander, I was like, 'That's who I want to be. That guy is a fucking badass. He's smart, he's tough, he's a good athlete.' And I could list off 20 or 30 guys like that that I still look up to. Matter of fact, I had a 30-minute conversation with Jim two nights ago to ask about you and Ray.

My dad was in the court too, and my dad used to tell me, 'Man, I'm still a little intimidated by my upperclassmen.' I called Jim, I go, 'Dude, I'm still a little intimidated by you, man. I don't think that'll ever go away.' But you get in the Court Cadets, and you had a father or have a father who was a very, very prominent lawyer in Dallas, right? So you got to see kind of your dad practice law and that lifestyle. What was that like? What kind of influence do you think that had on you?

Jake Banks: Oh, it was incredible. I mean, starting at a young age, I guess my sister and I were rambunctious, and for example, one day he came home and there was a hole on the door of the bathroom door, and he's like, 'who did this?' And my sister said, 'I don't know, I don't know.' If you get cross-examined by the chief felony prosecutor of Dallas County, you're going to break.

You're going to break an 11-year-old. Shit, I can't answer. You got me. So growing up, you never got away with anything because he was too smart. So the cases that he would talk about as a prosecutor were always super interesting, and it was always something I thought I wanted to do. Then as he became a defense attorney, he was a top guy. I mean, he was on speed dial for the Cowboys. So to see him go from a position of putting all these scumbags and bad people on death row to then coming back and living in the limelight and all these high-profile cases was exciting. It's like, wow, I want to do that.

Brian Beckcom: Didn't your dad represent Michael Irvin? Or at least he knew Michael Irvin at one point?

Jake Banks: That's a whole other story. It's funny, but Irvin came to him and said, I want you to be my lawyer. And Dad said, 'Okay, are you going to do this?' Irving said, 'No, I'm going to do it this way.' And my dad's like, 'Look, I don't tell you how to go run routes and catch your passes. Don't do it my way. Go hire somebody else.' And he was like, well no, and said, see you later. And ended up

getting the horrible deal, got suspended, fined all this other kind of stuff. If he'd stuck with Jerry Banks, he probably would've gotten a slap on the wrist.

Brian Beckcom: For folks that are listening that don't know Jerry Banks, I mean, he was so prominent that when a guy like Michael Irvin calls and Michael Irvin is the kind of guy that might have some repeat business based on his history, plus he's a super prominent athlete, obviously Jake's dad had enough business and was prominent enough to say, 'Look, if you don't want to do it the way I do it, then you can go find somebody else.' That's a pretty big deal for a lawyer to do. I mean, that says a lot about how prominent your father was in the legal community in Dallas.

Jake Banks: Yeah, definitely. I mean, he was top shit. I thought, wow, this would be great. I want to follow in his footsteps or this lifestyle or what he's doing is so interesting to me that man, this is a life goal not to do what he does, but to be in that profession that can allow you to achieve those kinds of things if you're good enough. That was super exciting for me, and I tried to do that and started at the DA's office in Fort Worth after law school and tried a bunch of cases. I wasn't interested in pushing paper in the office. I was in court every single day,

Brian Beckcom: 45 cases in your first year, and you won every single one except for the first one, right?

Jake Banks: Except for the first one. The first one pissed me off so bad. I realized it is a competition, and it's hard to describe it that way because it's an adversarial position. I didn't go home with a trophy. The loss is if you lose a case as a prosecutor, you either didn't prepare or you didn't analyze the case correctly, or you did something wrong in trial or something came up that you should have known about. If the prosecution takes a case to trial, they should win because you are putting somebody's liberty at risk, and you should be 100000000% certain that you've got the facts and the case to prove that and to convince a group of jurors to do that. So I didn't make that mistake again.

Jake's Experience in the Core of Cadets

Brian Beckcom: Jake, before we talk about your career as a prosecutor and the experiences that you write about in "Lawyer X," I want to talk a little bit about your experience in the Corps Cadets at A&M because I think your experience, while a lot of us had a great experience, you had somewhat of a unique experience because you were on the fish drill team, and at the time that you were at A&M, the Fish drill team was the baddest of the badasses. I mean, the baddest dudes at A&M, mainly dudes.

I don't think there were any girls on the fish drill team back when we were there, but I mean truly the baddest of the bad. I was talking to a mutual friend of ours, Todd Sel the other day about you, and he goes, 'Man, I remember Jake.' There used to be a drill where you'd make people run about 500 yards to go touch a building and run back. It was like a way of disciplining. Todd was like, 'Yeah, Jake told me to run and touch Denfeld.' I was like, 'What the fuck? That's on the opposite side of campus.' So he ran. Todd said, what he loved about you is he ran literally all the way across campus, touched the building, turned around, and you're running with him. He said 'The thing I've always loved about Jake is yeah, he was crazy and he would discipline you in crazy, crazy ways, but I never

felt like he ever asked me to do something that he wouldn't do himself.' That to me is a fundamental principle of leadership. Talk a little bit about your experience on the Fish Drill team because you truly got into the physical part of the Fish Drill team.

Jake Banks: Yeah, I mean it was a totally different deal back then. I think if you compare any basic day that we had practicing on the drill team as advisors or even as fish to nowadays, it would be a series of felony activities. I mean, hazing, beating all these kinds of things that the whole purpose of the thing was to make people quit. We were all masochists. We were like, I'm in this, I signed up. There's something in me that won't let me quit. I signed up. I said I was going to do it, and so I'm going to do it unless I die or get kicked off or don't make grades, I'm going to be here. That's what the drill team is made up of.

You've got guys out there that weren't superhuman stud athletes, not buff dudes, but just would not ever fucking quit. That's what they're looking for. That was the whole purpose of the drill team. It wasn't about going out there and marching and spinning a weapon. It was how much abuse can you take? How much abuse can you take because we're going to beat the shit out of you every day until you quit, and if you don't quit, here's this little piece of ribbon you get to wear on your uniform. That's what it's all about.

Brian Beckcom: My dad is probably the best, maybe the best life lesson I've ever had in my life. The day I left college, my dad bought me a book called "Don't Quit." The cover of the book was a bunch of pictures of different sporting events where people could have quit in the middle of a game or a race or whatever, and they didn't. My dad inscribed in the front of the book, I still have it as a matter of fact, it's about five feet away from me. Basically, it says, "Don't quit, persistent wins." I know you've learned this lesson, don't forget it. So my dad drilled that into my head to the point where there was just no way I would quit the court. There was no way I would quit the basketball team. There was no way I would quit the RVs. That just was not something that would even enter my mind as much as it might fucking suck at certain times. So, I was thinking about if the entire world was in complete and total anarchy, if I could choose any one of my friends to be with me by my side during that sort of thing, it would be Jake Banks. Because you have that mentality. I mean, seriously, dude, you have that mentality that there is absolutely nothing that would've made you quit the drill team.

Jake Banks: I appreciate that. And you know what the fucked up thing about that is? That man, there were so many days I wanted to,

Brian Beckcom: Yeah, me too.

Jake Banks: So many days for sure. How many times as a fish where you're busting ass across the quad? You get to class and you stink, and your uniform's all sweated out and all the good-looking girls in class are like, get away from me. Then you look over and you see some frat daddies that are rolling the class hungover because they've been out partying, and you're like, what the fuck am I doing? What am I doing?

I'm wasting it. I'm wasting my youth. I'm messing up. Why am I going to practice every day when I get jacked in the kidney so much that I come back and piss blood for an hour? Why am I doing this and

what is it? I told myself I was going to do it. I told myself I was going to do it, and that means I'm going to do it.

It seems like just last night my son called and said, 'Hey, are we going fishing today?' I said, 'Did I tell you we're going to go fishing today?' He said, yes. So why are you asking me if we're going fishing, we're going fishing. I told you we were. It's written in stone.

I really want to convey this to my kids and I want them to understand this, that you tell somebody you're going to do something. If you tell yourself you're going to do something, then you do it. Be careful what you tell people you're going to do and be careful what you tell yourself you're going to do. Don't overpromise yourself. Don't over-promise other people because you're a schmuck. If you can't come through, you're a flake. And nobody likes that guy. Nobody wants that guy in their foxhole. Nobody wants that guy on their team, so deliver, make your promises, and deliver.

Life's Principle: "Don't Quit"

Brian Beckcom: Jake, so one of the things that you mentioned there, which I think is another good lesson, is it's not like you didn't think about quitting. I thought about quitting the court a couple of times. I mean, I'd played on the basketball team my first year and was hanging out with the athletes and going to the tap every night and having a great time. When you're an athlete, let's just say you have maybe somewhat of an advantage when it comes to the social scene in a little way. I had really lived it up my first year. I had a really good time.

Then all of a sudden I'm shaving my head and getting in the Corps with a bunch of dip shits that I'm a year older than. I'm like, 'Who are these motherfuckers?' These guys hadn't done anything. And then fast forward four months later, and these guys all end up being some of my best friends.

I called my dad a couple of times, and I'm like, 'This is bullshit.' I don't want to do this anymore. My dad's like, just finish this semester. Just finish the damn semester. So that's what I tell people when they join the Corps, young kids now I'm like, just finish your freshman year. That's all you got to do. Once you do that, everything will be good. But the point of it is, Jake, it's not like you didn't think about quitting. It's not like I didn't think about quitting. Toughness is not about being stupid. Toughness is about not quitting. In other words, think about it this way, if it's easy and you don't feel like quitting, sticking it out ain't tough. It's tough when you don't want to do it. It's toughness when it's hard. It's toughness when you want to quit that. I mean, it's just like courage. Courage is not the absence of fear. Courage is being scared shitless and doing it anyway, right? Absolutely.

Jake Banks: Absolutely. It's not a marathon. I mean, it's not a sprint. It's one foot after the other. Go to the next class. Go to finish this semester. One more day, one more step. Don't fall out. Do the best you can. Go until you pass out. I mean, these are all things that we talk about and say, yeah, they're not just stories. These are real-life things that you do until it's done. And that's it. I mean, it's pretty, it's simple to say. It's hard to do.

Brian Beckcom: I was talking to a good friend of ours, Lieutenant Colonel Toby Flynn last night, and we were talking about some stuff, and one of the things I was talking about was I'm searching for

simple principles to live my life by, that's my current project. One of those principles is don't lie. The other one is don't quit. Some of this, like you're saying, sounds like that's kind of obvious, and that's not any sort of big insight or anything like that, but guess what? I think it's the simple shit that is the stuff that has lasted. The reason that people hear that all the time is because it fucking works. I mean, not quitting, being honest, being loyal, stuff like that. Those fundamental principles are fundamental principles and have been for hundreds of years for a reason because they work. Right?

Jake Banks: For sure. There have been times when you called your dad you wanted to quit, or I probably did the same thing and I got the same advice. But there are people in our lives who give us that motivation to say, 'Hey, man, one more day, one more step, one more mile, one more year, whatever it is.'

Brian Beckcom: Absolutely, absolutely

Jake Banks: Give you that pat on the back. To think that you go through life and generate your own mortality, you generate your own enthusiasm about life is probably not true because you've got all these people that have your back that are saying, 'Go for it at the finish line,' clapping, come on, come on, finish strong for sure. This is your friends, this is your family. These are the people that you rely on to get you through those times where you do want to quit and not talk you out of it, but give you a check. 'Hey, that's not you, dude. You're not a quitter. Keep it going.' And you're like, 'Yeah, man, you're right. I'm not a quitter.'

Brian Beckcom: Keep going. Persistence wins. I remember my first A&M basketball game. We played an exhibition against Marathon Oil. I didn't get to play at all in the game. We got back afterward and one of the assistant coaches came down and he said, 'Everybody divide up into position groups so we can go watch the film.' And I turned to one of my buddies, Damon Johnson, I go, 'Hey, this will be the second time I get to watch the game.' And one of the assistants overheard it. He goes, 'What'd you say? Get your ass up.' And so I had to go meet with the head coach. He goes, 'What'd you say?' And I told him, he goes with that kind of attitude you'll never play in another fucking game again. He was trying to get me to quit. Guess what? I played in the next game. I wouldn't quit.

Life As An Army Ranger

Brian Beckcom: The other thing, Jake, is just because I want people to get a flavor of what you were like in college and what you were like in law school so they can understand how you got through the experience that you got through in France. I think if I'm remembering correctly, you were part of a ranger school, an army ranger training where there were something like 60 or 70 people tried and there were only two slots and you were one of the ones that had gotten it. You had no experience in the military at all before that, which is hilarious. Tell us a little bit about the Army ranger stuff.

Jake Banks: It was a deal called Ranger Challenge, and a good friend of mine, Jim Welsh was on it as well. Another guy, John Donnelley was the leader. Basically, what it was, it was cadets that underwent and did or attempted to simulate ranger training while taking a full load of class. So the first day, it was similar to the drill team. On the first day on the drill team, 300 people came out, and

by the end of the year, there were 30 of us. 30 that made grades and took the abuse and stuck around. The Ranger challenge thing was a little bit different. It was physical, Hey, if you can't run this fast, see you. If you can't do this many pushups, see you. If you can't tie this knot and shoot this gun, throw this, or whatever it was, learn how to do it.

We came from a wing unit, which was all about the Air Force, and this was an army deal, and I didn't know shit about any of it. All I knew was that it looked cool. I wanted to do that. How do I do it? Well, you got to do it. It was a crash course in how can I get into this as fast as I can. And then I became useful to the teams to where they don't want to kick me off. So yeah, it was another deal where all these people came out and then when it was over, there was eight of us left, and we went on and did all this kickass stuff, competed, we're hardcore, hard-charging, and all these kind of different things.

Brian Beckcom: Did you ever think about taking a military contract?

Jake Banks: I did. I went to Airborne School and I blew out my knee after snow skiing junior year. So I went to Airborne School with a messed up knee but then got medically disqualified, thought about going to the Marines and then just said, well, fuck it. I'd rather go practice law, probably the same abuse, but for a long time I did. And even nowadays, I think, oh man, maybe I missed my calling. Maybe I should have done that. But then again, I think I've made some major, major mistakes.

Thank God I wasn't in charge of a platoon of men and had some fucking dumb ass idea that got everybody killed. Like my foray into France. At least it was just me who paid the price for that. I didn't take down a whole fucking company. So kind of thinking as far as you can do some good, it was like this.

As seniors at the end of our junior year, we would go in front of the core staff, or not the core staff, but the trigon to see who was going to be the commanding officer. The underclassmen were like, yeah, we want Jake to be our commander. The officers of the Trigon were like, 'Hey, all your underclassmen want you to do it, but you know what? We don't think you're mature enough. We think you would either lead them to victory or straight off a fucking cliff. We don't know about it. It could be either one. You could win the Medal of Honor or you could get everybody killed. We're not going to take that chance with you.'

I get it now. It's true. This is part of my personality. This is part of a personality that doesn't understand, recognize, or feel what is dangerous as opposed to excitement. Those two kind of overlap for me. So when you're dealing with yourself, you only put yourself at risk, but when you're taking care of everybody else, well shit, that's a whole different story.

Brian Beckcom: Well, I think those Trigon guys were actually pretty smart, not choosing you for the exact reasons you said. Looking back on it at the time, we would've been like these guys. So for people who don't know anything about the Corps Cadets, the Trigon is a building where the active duty military officers are in charge of the court. These are not Corps Cadets people. These are active-duty military officers. But back then I'd be sitting there thinking, these guys are a bunch of dumbasses for not making Jake Banks the commanding officer's outfit. He's a badass. But looking back on it, they're a little smarter than maybe we realized.

Jake Banks: These are the kind of guys you want to lead other guys in that particular setting. So yeah, if you're a Delta Force operator, you got to have a different mindset on this other stuff. If you're in the tank maintenance battalion, you got to have a different mindset. So trying to figure out where my brain and my attitude or my dementia fits. I can be as big of a dick as I want to other people. Honestly, that helps me when I engage with opposing counsel that we can't come to an agreement on certain things. They're like, you know what? You're such a dick. I'm so tired of fucking with you. Just get out of my face. Take what you want. Thank you very much. I'll use it every day. It's part of my personality. It's part of what helps my clients get what I want. So I'm going to use it. So perhaps I found what I'm supposed to be doing.

Brian Beckcom: I love that. I love that story because I'm kind of the same way as a lawyer. I think I have a little bit of a reputation amongst the defense bar for being somewhat unpredictable. I'll put it that way. They think I'm a little nuts. And you know what? I cultivate that. I want them to think that.

You know why I think they think I'm nuts? One of the reasons is because I fucking fight my ass off for my clients, and I'm not there to make friends with some dipshit who's representing an insurance company that will never even talk to the guy. I'm representing human beings like you are. And so you're damn right, I'm going to be unpredictable. Damn, I'm not there to be your friend. I'm sorry. Now, of course, I'm friends with lawyers I practice with. There's a lot of really, really good defense lawyers. But my objective is not to walk out of a case and be buddies with the defense lawyer. My objective is to kick your fucking ass in the ground and get my client the best deal I can get, the most money I can get. Or in your case, whatever the best deal is, right?

Jake Banks: I agree with you 100000000%. I'm not there to make friends. Now we're going to go in there and we're going to kick each other's ass during the trial. When it's over, shake hands and go have a beer. But when it's on, it's a fucking war. That's right. And let's have it. I'm not there. I'm going to use every trick I can. I'm going to use everything in my domain to win because that's what my clients asked me to do, and that's what I'm obligated to do.

Moments That Mentality Shape Us

Brian Beckcom: Jake, I think I developed that attitude playing basketball as a six-foot-two. I was a pretty good athlete, but I wasn't nearly as tall. I only weighed about 185 pounds at the time. Now I'm much fatter. But I developed this out. I was guarding guys that were 6'4, 6'5 big strong dudes. If I were a wimp about it, I would've gotten my ass kicked left. So I developed this attitude that I didn't care how big or tall you were when I stepped on the court, I was coming to kick your teeth in. I was coming to beat you, and you might beat me, but you're going to have to bust your goddamn ass to do anything for me. So that's my attitude in the courtroom now. I mean, I'm nice and professional, but if you make me go down to trial and we're in court, I'm not there to talk to you. I'm not there to have coffee with you afterward. I'm there to kick your ass. That's it. I'm there to fight for my client. So where do you think you developed? I developed it, I think mainly from basketball and sports. Where do you think you developed your mentality as far as that goes?

Jake Banks: I think I was just born a dick. I mean, I can't remember a time.

Brian Beckcom: Best answer ever.

Jake Banks: I think growing up, I remember a couple of things growing up, and my parents got divorced, and my dad raised me. He was a combat marine. I think his mentality was, yeah, I'm going to raise you to be a man. I'm not going to raise you to be a wimp. This was his idea of how to do it. As much as his father's idea of how to raise my dad was to do that as well. How do you develop your boy into a man? Granted, those things are so much different nowadays than they were back then.

One day I was getting a spanking, and I remember my dad said, 'Today, you've graduated from a spanking to an ass beating.' And I thought, oh shit. I am really, really in trouble. And so I took it and I didn't cry. Every time before that, I had cried. I just took it and took it and took it, and it was over. I turned around. I was like, 'Is that all you got?'

Brian Beckcom: Wrong question to ask your dad.

Jake Banks: That was it. I never got another lick after that. The point was it was so painful. I didn't want him to know that it hurt. I wasn't going to be hurt. I wasn't going to have this physical pain and let somebody else see or know that it hurt me or that it made me weak or something like that. So maybe that developed some fighting spirit. I don't know. But it's probably genetic. It's probably some sports growing up as a kid not wanting to lose, wanting to win. Those kinds of things like that as far as just bearing it down inside and using that energy of pain or suffering or angst or disappointment and not crying about it. Not bitching about it, but just bearing it and keeping it. And when you need it, uncork that shit and let it fly. Anybody close to you, watch the fuck out.

Brian Beckcom: I tell people, I've talked to my dad about this a little bit. One of the reasons I think I developed this kind of mentality was because my mother died when I was 10. I had this kind of conscious idea that I was going to show everybody that a person who was raised by a single father could be successful. So I had a chip on my shoulder. I tell my dad, I said, I have a little bit of, I don't know if dark side's the right word, but I have a little bit of an angry side. Might be that I'm half Irish, but there are certain things that, I mean, if somebody were to mess with a friend of mine or one of my family members, I would snap and I would lose it. It's happened before to me a couple of times. I'm not proud of it, but it happens and it's part of your personality, and it's neither good nor bad, I don't think. As long as you are aware of it, then you can take steps to control it. Right?

Jake Banks: Exactly, and this is the meditation. This is the sitting in the room for 5 minutes or 20 minutes or an hour by yourself and realize, why do I lash out at this person when they did this? Well, it hurt me. They hurt my feelings, so now I want to lash out. Is that appropriate as a 47, almost 48-year-old man, maybe in some cases, to my kids, to my family, to my friends, yeah, I'm going to go full blast.

Is it appropriate if somebody accidentally bumps into the street? Of course not. So trying to get ahold of who you are and how you're going to react to adversity is something you either run away from, embrace, or go after. So you have very few options when it comes to it,

Brian Beckcom: Sometimes just reframing your perception a little bit can totally change the way you view things. So four or five years ago, I was listening to some meditation, a guy was talking about road rage and how people get pissed off when this idiot is not driving fast, and this person cut me off. I used to be just like everybody else, oh, that dumb ass. What the fuck is he doing? And now instead of thinking that, what I think is maybe they're on the way to the hospital because something happened to their kid, or maybe this is an older person like my father who's just not as good of a driver. It has completely and totally changed the way I think about those things.

Jake Banks: Absolutely. I did the same thing. I was such a road rager, and one day I remember this super vividly. The person in front of me was going so slow. I was banging on the dash and flipping the bird and getting up next to him to give him the evil stare. It was an 80-year-old woman driving the car. I'm like, Jake, you fucking asshole. Way to go, asshole. Way to go dickhead. She's doing the best she can driving. You're like, am I a fucking total shitbag? Yes.

What I think now when I get road rage, is that I'm mad at somebody else for doing something in a way that I don't do, which is silly. It's ridiculous because you didn't do it the way I did it. It doesn't make any sense. It's immature to think that, right? No doubt. Some total stranger that's going south and I'm going north. I mean, it just doesn't make any sense. But if you can sit down and analyze, why did I just get so mad about that? They made me mad. They did it some way differently than I did it. Okay, do it however you want.

Jake's Journey Into Law School

Brian Beckcom: Well, Jake, so you go to Court Cadets, you graduate, you describe it in your book as 'I get into the only law school that would accept me.' I don't even think it's now called the Texas A&M Law School. At the time, it was Texas Wesley. I don't even think it was certified at the time, was it?

Jake Banks: It had provisional accreditation, which is if you got the money and a pulse you can join.

Brian Beckcom: Now it's, by the way, a much better law school. But it was relatively new.

Jake Banks: It was brand new. It had been in service for maybe two or three years. They had provisional accreditation from the ABA, which means the provisional accreditation was that if you graduated from there, you could sit for the bar and become a lawyer as opposed to a non-accredited law school where if you graduated, you couldn't sit for the bar, you couldn't become a lawyer. So I had provisional accreditation. Then I guess after my first year, it was fully accredited. So it was a new place, it was a startup, and then it got fully accredited. And we went on from there.

Brian Beckcom: Tell me if you agree with this. I mean, Joe Jamell, one of the most famous plaintiffs' lawyers of all time made AC in torts at UT. The only reason he got into UT is that at the time, if you went to undergrad, you would get into law school. Now it's not like that, but the point is, you didn't go to a great law school. You weren't the number one graduate of the law school, but you get out and go work for the district attorney and you're a kick-ass fucking prosecutor. So I've never thought that there was any relationship really at all between being a good trial lawyer and making grades and

being an egghead nerd at some Ivy League law school. Matter of fact, there's nothing I like better than going against some Ivy League dipshit lawyer who thinks he's smarter than me and showing him, 'Man, maybe you are smarter than me in some ways, but where it matters in court, you got no chance.' You were a phenomenal prosecutor for a year. And the way you put it in the book I think is really funny. You go, I tried 45 cases my first year. I only lost the first one, and then I spent the next two years in a prison in France. So tell us a little bit about what it was like being a prosecutor, you're kicking ass, you're doing great, and then you start your own business. Tell us about that period of your life, and what that was like.

Jake Banks: I'd gone to the DA's, and I had been an extern there at the DA, which is basically, you go and work for free. It wasn't an internship that would be a paid position but an externship. I did everything I was told, soaked up, sponged up as much knowledge from everybody as I could. The funny part was that I passed the bar with the cutoff. For the bar exam, if you make under 675, you fail. I made a 690, B plus. They're like, 'Yeah, well, Jake, we'll give you a chance. We like you.' I showed up for work every day as an extern.

Anyway, so I got to the point where - have you ever been shooting baskets and you're just making 'em free throw after free throw, you're just in the zone all the time. You feel like, oh, I'm supposed to be doing this. I could stand here and make these baskets forever like that? - I felt like I could walk into a courtroom and I didn't even have to read the case file. I just walked in there, tried the case, and got a guilty verdict because I could sense what the jurors were thinking. I could sense the judge. I could sense the case. I could judge the opposing counsel in 10 seconds. It was just an automatic, almost kind of deal.

Brian Beckcom: Almost like this was what you'd been training to do your whole life. I mean, you just took to it naturally, right?

Jake Banks: Yeah. It was kind of like, 'Hey, you're a natural at this. You're good. Pretty good.' And so I enjoyed it. It was great. And after a year of doing cases, trying cases, and getting all different kinds of defense attorneys and going to get some good guys and really famous people and shit, man, these guys are the real deal. I can do this. I'm spinning my wheels here at the DA's. They've taught me, but this is how arrogant and just egomaniac I was. I think I've been here for a year. Y'all have taught me everything I need to know, right?

Brian Beckcom: Yeah. Right.

Jake Banks: I didn't try a felony case. I didn't go to the grand jury. I didn't do a lot of other things that prosecutors do before they go out and become defense attorneys so that they can know up and down what the prosecutor does. I thought this was all about trying cases. This is all about being in front of a jury. I got this. This shit's easy. Thanks for the experience. I'm going to go out here and kill it on my own. And such a flawed way of thinking. But then again, trial lawyers are egomaniacs.

Brian Beckcom: Got to be. You got to be.

Jake Banks: Got to be a little bit. You've got to convince or you've got to have the confidence that a defendant's going to come to you and think, 'Oh, this is the guy that I want to go fight for me. This is the guy that's going to get me out of trouble. Or this is the guy that's going to go kick ass and do the best possible thing for my case.' And you tell 'em, 'Yeah, absolutely. I'm the guy to do that for you.' So there is some ego to it. There's a lot of ego to it. And the flip side of that is shit, man. Sometimes it doesn't work out and you find yourself in a French prison.

From Prosecutor To French Prison

Brian Beckcom: Maybe part of the issue is, and I want to hear not only about the story, but I want to hear what was going through your bald ass head during this time. Dude, maybe part of this was you had been so successful, and you'd taken a lot of risk in your life. It would be the understatement of the year to say that you, I, and our circle of friends had a good time in college. I mean, that would be the understatement of the year. We did a lot of crazy stuff, and had a lot of fun. You were kicking ass as a prosecutor. Maybe one of the reasons you thought you could get away with this scheme of yours was you just got overconfident. You're just too damn cocky. You just thought that you were untouchable, essentially. I mean, was that part of it?

Jake Banks: Even beyond that? I thought I was fucking invisible. I thought, shit, I can just go and breeze through here, carry this bag of drugs, send it over here, and just nobody's going to know anything else. Because you know what? Why? Because I'm Jake Banks. No other fucking reason besides that, and it's so, I don't even know what the word is. So crazy to think that I'm above the law, or not even above the law, but outside the law. I don't have to follow any of that shit. How did I get there? Shit, man, using drugs, using ecstasy, which is what we were smuggling. So the more you do this stuff, you're like, 'Oh yeah, this is fun.' This is great. Everybody in my law school uses it. All my buddies use it. We have such a great time. It's not like I'm injecting heroin or robbing a little lady, is just for my habit. We're popping pills, going to parties, getting laid, and having a good time. Yeah, right.

Brian Beckcom: What's wrong with that? Nothing wrong with that. Right? Not hurting anybody.

Jake Banks: Not hurting anybody. If it's illegal, that's just because the law is stupid. So maybe that law doesn't apply to me because it's stupid. This just totally fucked up thinking on all different fronts on how that applies. The more you do it, the more you think this is okay. This is okay. Like walking down the street, smoking a joint. People do that all the time here in New Braunfels. Everybody's on the river smoking weed, and you can smell the weed on the river here in this town. They're going to prosecute you to the fullest extent for a joint. They're not going to reduce it. They're not going to give you deferred. You might get deferred. They're going to put you on probation. It is a serious crime here, and people smoke weed all the time, so why not? I'll just go down the river and smoke. Oh shit, what do you mean? This is illegal? Yeah, in trouble. Oh fuck, but I do it all the time. Yeah, still illegal.

Brian Beckcom: Still illegal. Yeah, that's right. And we're going to have a conversation, I hope here after we talk about your experience in France about the drug war in general because I think it's fair to say you and I both have some pretty strong feelings about this, but you start the first sentence of

your book: "When the 50,000 ecstasy pills didn't show up, I knew we were fucked." What a great way. When I read that, I was like, is this Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas part three? This sounds like Hunter Thompson writing this shit, right? But you tell this great story about how the first time you knew there was a problem, you had smuggled ecstasy from France into the United States a couple of times, and then one of the shipments didn't show up, and that's when you knew you were in trouble. By the way, you were a fucking shitty drug smuggler. You left so many tracks. You even say that in the book, but you thought you were smarter than you were. But anyway, you decide, I'm going to fly over to France and see if I can figure out what's going on, right?

Jake Banks: This is it. We touched on this a little bit before, but I think my forte in life has always been for some reason or another, whatever I get into, I get into it. I'm an outsider, and then I get into it, and I get into a position where I cannot be let go. I am essential personnel within a very, very, very short time. 'Who's this Jade guy? Well, I don't know, but we've got to have him for the mission to be successful. We've got to have this guy on our team.' That's always going to be kind of my forte to come from nowhere and get into the middle of things, and then just be a person that you can't live without to make it happen. When the shit went down in France, we had been traveling. We would go to France and then up to Amsterdam, and this was to throw off the tracks, and it was so fucking stupid thinking, so idiot-proof. I'm in prison in France, and my attorney from the US is there, and he's like, 'What the fuck? You flew to France every single time? The golden rule of drug smugglers is you fly to a different place every time. My response is, well, yeah, if somebody sees you flying to a different place every time, they're going to think you're a drug smuggler. Just flawed thinking. I mean, there is no correct thinking about how to do this. The only way that you could ever get away with it is, I don't know,

Brian Beckcom: Don't do it in the first place, right? Yeah. That's it.

Jake Banks: The only way you get away is to not do it. Even if you were the only person involved, and the only way you could do it is if you made it and used it yourself and never told anybody about it, then if you got drug tested, you would still be found. So there's absolutely no way. There's no rational thinking about how to get away with it unless you've got a submarine from Columbia. They just busted one a couple of days ago with 40 tons of cocaine on it.

Brian Beckcom: Or unless you're the CIA and you want to flood inner cities with crack cocaine in order to fund a legal war. But we'll talk about that maybe a little bit later. There are a couple of scenes in your book that I really want to get some color on. So you go over to France,

Jake Banks: We started at the beginning, greed, greed, greed, greed, greed, right? Gordon Gecko said, greed is good. Gordon Gecko went to jail for sure. So when there were three of us involved in the deal, my position was really just sidekick, a small-time investor to go over there with the two principles and have a good time, maybe help them figure out a clever way to ship it back or find another recipient to help, but not necessary to the conspiracy at all, really just to add along. So when the shit went down, the first thing that went into my head was, all right, I'm going to cut myself in for more. There's a problem over there, and their problem needs to be affixed, so let me go fix it. When I do, instead of being a bit player, I'm going to be the partner, or I'm going to be the controlling partner.

I'm going to be the money guy. You're going to use this as an opportunity to get a better deal for yourself, a better financial deal. I get a little 10%, I'm going to cut one guy out and I'm going to take 60%. The dealer and the distributor can take 40. Because when I went there and negotiated with these guys, that was my game and that was what I told them.

Brian Beckcom: Dude, I got to set the scene here for people. So my favorite movie of all times, Goodfellas. One of the things I fucking love about that movie is how the pace of the movie starts slow. By the end, when Henry Hill is selling cocaine, whatever it was, he was selling hard drugs, he was selling the pace quickens. The movie gets faster, he's looking around at helicopters, and the music gets faster. Jake, man, I'm reading your book and it's got that same effect on me. The pace starts to get faster. You are over there, you're drinking, smoking weed, trying to solve this drug deal. Anyway, you go to this meeting and there's one person that you were supposed to meet, and then a guy from Columbia and another person that you didn't know. The way you describe this scene, I mean, they were clearly trying to intimidate you. They were seeing if they could trust you. You're staring 'em down. But in the book, you talk about what's going through your mind. What you're doing on the surface, you may look like you're not scared, but in your mind, you're freaking out at the time, right?

Jake Banks: Yeah. Oh, I'm shitting my pants, I'm shitting my pants, and I realize I'm staring down these three guys that are probably, I mean, sketchy as fuck.

Brian Beckcom: Yeah. And they think you've stolen their money.

Jake Banks: They think I've stolen their money. They think I've come back to rip them off again. They don't know why I came back. Finally, I convinced 'em that if I was trying to rip them off, I would not have come back. And by the end of it, it had gone from, 'Hey, we're going to fucking take you over in the corner of this bar and kill your ass too. Hey, you got some balls. We are only going to deal with you now. Your partners are pussies for not coming back over here. Your partners are wimps. You got balls. So I'll deal with you from now on, and you're the only person that will take money from or send the stuff to. So greed, I got what I came for.

Brian Beckcom: And that's got to be, in addition to being scary as hell, it's got to be exhilarating too. Especially when you feel like you pulled it off. I mean, you're like, 'Oh, man, I fucking stared these guys down and pulled this shit off.' I mean, that's got to be kind of, in a way, a really good adrenaline and all that shit going through your body, right?

Jake Banks: Oh, dude. It was like the biggest drug there was. Honestly, when you go a little sidekick to that, it's a negotiation, right? How many units, and how many tablets are we dealing with? When I get down to Panama, we're talking about how many meters of property. When I get back up here to Texas, it's how many months in jail? So it's all the same negotiation ability. It's just different, the thing you're negotiating is different.

Brian Beckcom: I think you're right. The principles remain the same. There was even a guy that's like, 'Hey, dude, you want some fucking grenades?' Some guy showed up and he was going to sell you grenades, right? Like, holy shit,

Jake Banks: I had never been in a situation like that in my life. Won't be again. It was super intense. It was so intense that after I left there, I mean, we're standing at the door and I'm thinking, I'm still shaky. I'm still shaky. I give them all my money because, at that point, it's like, you owe us 10 grand. I had no idea that my partner owed them money because he didn't tell me that. So they're like, well if you want us to give you some more stuff, you have to pay us for what you already owe us. Well, okay, if I give you this money, you're all going to show up again. Sure, prepay your drugs. Never going to prepay a drug dealer. You'll never see 'em again. They take your money and run. So I'll never forget, we're standing at the front door of the hotel and the meeting is breaking up and they're like, 'Hey, come with us. Come with us. We're having a party out at my friend's house in the country.' And I'm like, fuck. No way in hell. I mean, I'm holding onto the door of the hotel in case they try and grab me and throw me in the car. No, I'm good. I got some jet lag trying to play it off and cool. They get in the car and laugh their ass off and drive away. 'Oh, you think we're going to kill you? Ha ha ha.' And they get in the car.

Brian Beckcom: Man, that is freaky. It reminds me of a book I read by a guy named Gavin de Becker. He's an international security expert. One thing he said that really stuck with me was, if anybody tries to move you to a different location, you should resist with everything you have. I tell my wife that. I tell my daughter that. I'm like, don't let 'em move you. Period. End of discussion. So if you would've went out to that house in the country at the time the tensions were high, who knows what would have happened out there?

Jake Banks: Who knows? I'm glad I don't know.

The 5,000 Ecstasy Pills

Brian Beckcom: So then you get back, and you spend a couple of days messing around, smoking weed, drinking, trying to get everything squared away. You're kind of in a rush. This is where the part of the book really speeds up. It's just like the end of Goodfellows, at least as far as I'm concerned, the pacing of it. But you got 5,000 ecstasy pills basically in a package up against your private parts, and you're going through customs. Tell us how you got busted. Tell us what happened.

Jake Banks: That's the small part because when I went, the dealers over in Amsterdam were like, 'You owe us 10 grand.' I said, well, 'I need more pills.' They said, 'Well, pay us for what you owe, and then we'll get you some more.' I'm thinking, okay, well, they'll give me however many more, anything more than what I have. We'll have to build the business back up because I've never sold any of this. None of the stuff was ever sold in Texas; all sold in Arizona. So I'm thinking, okay, I'll get five or 10,000 pills, which is about this.

Brian Beckcom: For people that are just listening, it would be this size of a volleyball or something like that, right? Maybe a little smaller.

Jake Banks: Yeah, something like that. I guess it's not as big. Maybe three or four inches by six by six, something like that. It's not as giant as you would think. This is what I think; I'm going to get to help start the conspiracy back up again. What I got was 25,000 pills. They said, well, we're giving

you this. This is what we have because we made a special batch with a special brand on it. So we're going to give you all those. Your business started back up, and I thought, this is insane. Why are you giving me more than what I've asked for? Because we trust you. You've got balls. You came back when there was a problem. I think, all right, great. I'm flying high. These guys love me. I got zero problems on this end. All I got to do is come over here every now and then with some money, send it to a dude in Arizona, and then he sends me the proceeds.

There were so many pills that I didn't know what to do. I thought, how the hell am I going to ship all these back? Should I toss 10,000 of them? No, I can't do that. That's a hundred thousand dollars right there. Should I, what the heck can I do? So I'm scrambling, I'm manic trying to figure out how to package them to ship them, to get them someplace to go and do and get them back.

Brian Beckcom: So, you're scrambling around with only a couple of days before you got to fly back to the United States. This is only a couple of days where Jake is having to solve all these logistical problems.

Jake Banks: Like four days, go there, work a deal, get the stuff, package it, get back home, and get high as heck all the time because I got great weed and all that other stuff. So, I'm not thinking straight about anything. It's like great.

Brian Beckcom: So, you're going through customs, you think you've got everything solved. You think you're this big kingpin, and next thing you know, boom, you're pulling your pants down. And they busted you.

Jake Banks: They had us there. They had us because of the shipment that got stopped on a prior trip. They had us on video, and they were looking for us. They had been able to trace us, and they knew who we were. They had some kind of APB or whatever out, whatever they call it in France to look for us. So when I walked through the airport, they're like, oh, there he is. Go get him. It was no surprise. They said to me, we thought we knew you would be back, but just not so soon.

Brian Beckcom: We didn't know you would be so stupid to stay at the same hotel three times in a row, so we could tell the hotel person when he comes back, to call us up. So the way you describe it in the book is you think that this hot French girl at the hotel desk has the hots for you? Yeah, you thought she wanted you, but really she was in on it.

Jake Banks: She's scared. She's like, oh my God, we got a red slip for this guy to notify the police, so I'll do whatever he says because I don't know if he's a bad guy or what he is. I'm thinking, oh yeah, let's go have a drink, miss. She's like, no.

Brian Beckcom: It's just like at the end of Goodfellows, when they get busted with the drugs. You remember they take Henry and Karen, his wife, into the police station, and they look around and the whole operation is there. They've busted everybody. It was kind of the same with you. I mean, they busted you. You talk about this in the book. You go through a series of denials and you're trying to throw them off the trail. They're showing you pictures, they're showing you video, and then they're

showing you receipts. At some point you're like, I'm done. This is it. It's over with. So when you finally hit that point, Jake, what went through your mind? What did you feel like?

Jake Banks: Yeah, I mean, you see some of these movies where it's the good cop, bad cop, and just trying to beat it out. Man, that stuff never works. It's like, we got this one, we got this paper, and they were just beating the heck out of me with slips of paper, just whipping me with pieces of paper, punching me. 'Oh, and this is your buddy, and thinking, yeah, you know what?' Throwing my mind is the same thing that came out of my guts. I leaned over and pukeed in the trash can because it was like, dude, you're done.

Brian Beckcom: It's over. It's over.

Jake Banks: Not only do they have you, you're so dumb. You make it so easy for them. So what's the biggest thing you can do to an egomaniac is make him feel like an idiot or prove that he is an idiot. So you go from, I'm invisible to, I'm the dumbest guy that ever walked the face of the earth.

Overcoming Self-Shame After Failing

Brian Beckcom: Jake, tell me if I'm thinking about this, right, because I'm sure you felt like complete crap about getting busted, but the fact that people were going to know how stupid this was, the shame of it, that kind of emotion, that probably was even worse in a way, right?

Jake Banks: No, it wasn't that. It was self-shame. It was how could I be so dumb? I'm not a stupid guy, but this thing that I did is the stupidest thing that anybody has ever done in their life, in my life, and I'm the dumbest person to walk the face of the earth. Not that I was worried that, 'Oh, somebody's going to think that I'm dumb.' I thought that I was dumb.

I've always felt like a confident person. I can do something on my mind, and then have that whole thing shattered just in an instant like, 'Yeah, dude, you're a dumb dumbass,' and have your own conscience telling you you're a dumbass, and there is no escape from it.

I care what I think, and my thoughts were 'You're the stupidest person that has ever lived.' To overcome that, it took me 10 years. It took me so long to overcome the shame of it all and the stupidity of it all, that I didn't really think I would ever overcome it. There's probably not a day that goes by that I don't think about it. But one day I'm in Panama and I got a house on the beach, got two kids, a wife, no debt, everything's great. I look around and I feel like, you know what? I'm satisfied.

I'm satisfied. I've reached a level of satisfaction in my life, and that's very difficult. I think it's rare that a lot of people get satisfaction and just sit back and realize, okay, I'm not that guy that did that thing. I am that guy that did that thing, but I've come out of it. Now I can put that shame aside because I got my stuff back together.

Experiencing Uncertainty in Prison

Brian Beckcom: For sure. It reminds me of a saying that I tell people when I'm ashamed of something I did or something like that, the voice in my head. If that voice was another person, that

would be my worst enemy, right? That voice that's criticizing you. Tell us a little bit about what it was like being in a prison in a foreign country where you couldn't even really, at least at first, communicate with your fellow prisoners. What was that like?

Jake Banks: So the setup is Monday. I'm in Fort Worth, Texas. I get on a plane, and then I'm in France for a few days. Then the following Monday, I was in a prison cell outside of Paris.

No one knew where I was, nobody. I'm in France somewhere. How do I communicate with anybody? What's going on? Can you, no, you can't tell me. You're telling me, but you're speaking French, so I don't know what the heck you're saying. Not having any idea about where I'm going, what the procedure is, or what am I doing? Do we get food? Are we taking a shower? Am I going to be here for a year, a hundred years? Am I facing the death penalty? What the heck is going on? So man, the thing that killed me and probably is one of the most difficult things to deal with on so many levels, many businesses and so many different people's lives, is uncertainty.

To be like, what is going on? And nobody has an answer, how long will I be here? Don't know what's going to happen. Can't tell you, go back to your cell and sit there and sit in that cell for 23 hours a day. Then that one hour you can go out and walk around in a circle and ask everybody else what they're doing, and they're going to tell you the same thing. I don't know what's going on. I don't know. So the uncertainty, man, just drives at you, and your mind goes into this place of, oh God, if I could go back in time, I know that's impossible, but oh, if I could have done this different, oh no, that's impossible. What am I going to do now? I don't know what I'm going to do now because I don't know what there is to do to help myself. In fact, there is nothing that I can do to help myself except not die or go crazy.

That is a really, really difficult position to be in for somebody like me. I've always taken care of myself and managed my own stuff, and now having to totally rely on everybody else to help me get out of this jam. It was so frustrating. Just mind-blowing, it's Groundhog Day. You said earlier Groundhog Day, but Groundhog Day where you're being hazed all day, what's going to happen tomorrow? Well, you're going to sit here, be miserable all day, look out the window at a brick wall and then wonder what the heck's going on. Then tomorrow you're going to do the same thing. No break in the monotony, no break in the, 'Hey, something good happened today' or none of that. Just trying, hoping, and just holding on that your crew's going to come through for you. That's really what it was. And it was so extremely difficult to not be able to help yourself.

Brian Beckcom: Jake, you talk about this at the beginning of the book, people in America don't realize the French legal system is not the same as America. I mean, you're asking for a lawyer and they're just like, you don't get one, sorry. We're going to interrogate you. You can ask for a lawyer all you want, but you're not getting one. So not only do you not know where you are, you don't know what's going to happen, but unlike the American legal system, you don't even get your own lawyer at first. I mean, they're just hammering you with questions.

Let me ask you this, how long did you spend in prison where it was 23 hours a day with one hour being able to walk in a circle? How long did you have to go through that?

Jake Banks: Two years.

Brian Beckcom: You spent two years every day pretty much just like that.

Alone With Your Thoughts

Brian Beckcom: What in the fuck are you doing for 23 hours a day for two years? What are you doing in that cell?

Jake Banks: Man, being alone with your thoughts, being alone with yourself, and thinking you're the worst fucking human being that ever walked this planet because you broke your fucking parents' hearts. Thinking, standing in front of the mirror, looking at yourself. All you had to do was not fuck up. All you had to do was not decide you wanted to get into an international drug conspiracy and you got it made. All you had to do was just not be a fucking crook. You had it made, you don't have any student debt, you don't have this, you got a kick-ass building that you just bought, which was fantastic. It's paying for itself.

Your angle is going straight up. All you got to do is keep on doing what you're doing. But no, you thought it was a good idea to come over and do this shit that ended up fucking just destroying your ass and thinking how moronic you are.

Being alone there, the thing that helped me the most at the beginning was the Bible. I swear to God, I'd never been to church, been to synagogue a few times. I don't claim any one particular religion over the other, but I think at the base of it, treating everybody like you want to be treated is kind of what they're all saying. I read the Bible, man. I read it cover to cover, and it made me realize that I wasn't the worst person on the face of the earth. The same things that I did betray my friend, lie, cheat, steal, do all these things. This is what humans do and have done since recorded history. I'm not the only one that's ever been in this position, and I'm not the only one that has done this kind of shit and then redeemed themselves at some point later. It wasn't a sentence, a death sentence.

I wasn't an evil person. I was a dumb ass, a fucking idiot. To feel so shitty about yourself to think, how can I break out of this? The stories in the Bible pointed me in that direction and helped me uplift my spirit to where I thought, 'Okay, I'm not the worst person that ever lived. I'm not the only person or the first person who's ever done something like this. There is hope.' That helped me tremendously.

To The Letter Writers

Brian Beckcom: We have a mutual, I didn't know this until last week, but we have a mutual friend who is a very prominent military officer, and I learned recently that he sent you a letter every single week for two years when you were in jail. I am sure stuff like that helped too, because one of the things that I think you were probably worried about, I would be worried about it in your situation, is are my family and friends going to abandon me because of what I did? I'm sure it helped a lot when you realized at some point that you had a family and a group of friends that were not going to

abandon you, they were going to stick with you, they weren't going to say, 'Hey, Jake, that was really smart. We support your drug dealing,' but they were not going to quit on you. Right?

Jake Banks: It was straight up tough love, straight up, tough love. I think the lowest point there, I'm looking at a maximum of 10 years in France, because France doesn't penalize drugs the way the United States does. Their whole legal system is set up differently. They want to punish the individual. They don't care about the other conspirators. In fact, if five guys are caught, they don't ask you to incriminate the other person because this goes against their judicial theory of we caught you. You confess and you pay. It's not, 'Hey, we caught you and we're going to put you in jail for life. We're going to take your kids and put them in the custody of CPS. We're going to put your wife in jail unless you rat out everybody else in the United States. If you want a deal, then tell everybody.' France doesn't do it like that. Part of that is because of World War II where the Nazi collaborators got a lot of other French people killed. They accepted that we're not going to do that anymore. We're not going to, it was the Vichy government.

Brian Beckcom: Interesting. I had no idea that it had such an impact on their legal system. That's fascinating.

Jake Banks: Yeah. That's why they were like, look, we don't want to get back into this deal. That really was a huge division in France during World War II of people ratting each other out because the Germans wanted them. We caught you a French underground person. Tell us the other guys, if you don't, here's your kid right here, we're going to blow. Plus the sentences there, you're looking at a maximum of 10 years, not life. Even on a 10-year sentence, you're out in five. The difference is that those five years are in a cell, 23 hours a day, and are much more intense than a general population or something else you'd have in the States.

But I'm going back to your original question, the lowest point in there, the letters that I got from my friends, it wasn't like everybody. I was surprised, actually, a couple of people were so mad at me, so mad at me, they told me 'I'm not going to write you because I'm so mad at you for what you did.' I thought, well, fuck you. I'm the one sitting over here in jail, not you.

It took me a while to realize that I'm mad at you because I love you so much and you fucked yourself up so bad because you had it made. I'm so mad at you for doing that. I'm so mad at you for doing that, mad at what you're doing to your parents. I'm mad at you for doing that, so I'm not talking to you right now. I'm mad at you. It took me a while to understand where they're coming from, but it was totally justified. I totally deserved it. As far as the letters, the only person that wrote more than our buddy was my mom.

She almost wrote every single day. I got a letter, and I haven't told this much, but it was really impactful because I think my attorney from the States had sent me a letter and said, look, you're looking at 10 years in France, and then you're looking at life imprisonment for each count, for each trip, basically, 10 life terms in the United States. You're thinking, so what I can do 10 years over here and then go back to the States and spend life in prison, fuck, I might as well kill myself. I might as well quit.

So just stick it out the first semester. Don't quit. You signed up for it. Don't quit. I get a letter from my buddy saying a lot of positive things, keep it up, then another letter that Buddy had been killed in a car accident, I thought to myself, and I was sitting on my bed with a fucking razor that I had taken from a shaving thing, thinking, what the fuck, dude? I'm not going to wait around just to wait around to go to prison for the rest of my life. What the fuck is the point in that? End it now get this shit over with, fall out of the race, quit punch.

I get this letter saying he's died. It made me feel like the biggest pussy in the world to think I was going to take my own life here. His life had been taken from him, and I was thinking about doing that to myself. It just totally changed the way I was thinking about it. It was, I want to quit and then, hey, stay till the end of the semester. So that's what I did, and it really changed my mind. The book is dedicated to the letter writers, man, because there is no way I could have.

Brian Beckcom: Dude, I just got chills. It just went right down my spine. I'm not kidding you, man, because I remember at the very beginning of the book, it says to the letter writers, and I was wondering what you meant by that. I thought what you meant was to the people that had been in prison, that had written letters for whatever reason, to those kinds of people. But you dedicated that book to the people that wrote you letters.

Jake Banks: Yes, because there was no phone, there was no communication. There was nothing for me to be like, Hey, what's going on? Oh, it's good, mom. It's good to hear your voice or whatever. It was a letter and wait and write a letter on a three or four-week delay between letters. But every day at 3:30 or 4 o'clock, hearing the guard come down the hall, hearing the footsteps, and just being, 'Come on, please, please, please, please, please, please, please, please.' If he walked by your door, fuck day was shit. If he let slip under your door, 'Hey, best day ever, it was Christmas.' Just relying on those slips of paper to keep your spirit up.

Brian Beckcom: How did you end up going from potentially 10 years plus life in prison to two years in France? How did that get worked out?

Jake Banks: France, they don't punish. All drugs are the same there. It's not important, the quantity either. Really interesting. There was something that I guess if you're a king, not a king, not even kingpin. There was some slight part of the law that basically it was a misdemeanor case that I had 50,000 pills. That was a misdemeanor case because all drug cases were misdemeanor, unless there was some caveat. I can't remember what it was, but they would kick it up to their version of a felony.

Everybody in the prison was a foreigner. I mean, everybody in there was from South America, traffickers bringing drugs across, and the average sentence was three years. You get out at halftime, at a year and a half, and you're exiled from the country for 10 years. My sentence was a little bit longer than most other people, like six months longer. The original sentence was four years, but it was reduced. You get at it halftime by law because you are a foreigner and you're going to be outed, so 10 years would be the max. Hardly. I didn't know anybody that got the max. I don't know anybody that got five years. It was all, this guy's a foreigner. He is not French, get him out of here. We're sick of paying for him. Send him back to the States, and let him do what he's going to do there.

Brian Beckcom: How long were you in prison before you found out that you had a chance of getting out? A couple of years. How long did that take?

Jake Banks: Probably three or four months.

Brian Beckcom: I bet those three or four months fucking sucked.

Jake Banks: Just insane. I mean, I'm coming straight from being a prosecutor, so now I've literally been a prosecutor. Now I'm in prison with a bunch of these defendants, and they're telling me this, and they're telling me that. I'm thinking, oh yeah, jailhouse attorney, jailhouse attorney. You guys don't know shit. They were actually pretty accurate. I mean, they were actually pretty good at what they said because it was across the board. Hey, they're all foreigners. I mean, maybe the Parisians had a different sentence. But they were trying to get the foreigners out of there because they were sick of housing, paying for, and feeding us. That was to my benefit there for sure.

Brian Beckcom: What happened with the stuff in the United States?

Jake Banks: Well in the United States, my two other co-conspirators were in Arizona. They had the information that the federal prosecutor, the DEA, and the ICE guys wanted. I didn't have any connections. I didn't sell the shit. I didn't deal this stuff. All I did was work out a deal, try and figure out a way to ship it, and then collect the profits. So who they were dealing to, who their consumers were, and where these 50,000, I guess 125,000 pills altogether, where they were going, who was buying all these pills. When one of the co-conspirators went to work as a confidential informant, he didn't get prosecuted. The other guy who was really the ringleader, gave up all kinds of people and they busted all those guys. He didn't get prosecuted.

The federal prosecutor looked at me and said, 'Hey, you know what? The other two guys aren't going to prison. You've done enough shit over there. Don't practice law for five years.' Handshake deal. This is all a handshake deal. We trust you. Don't practice law for five years, don't get in any trouble, don't communicate with these guys, and you're good here. So I thought, fucking okay.

Heading Back to The States

Brian Beckcom: That's easy, right? I can do that. No problem. So then you come, and by the way, what a contrast in the mentality between the French legal system and the United States legal system. You come back to the United States, and then you quickly leave the United States. You've talked a couple of times about being in Panama. So tell us kind of how, when you got out of prison in France and you come back to the States, how do you put your life back.

Jake Banks: Together? It was difficult. I came back, and I'll never forget. You see guys get off the plane and they kiss the ground. I got to Dallas and I was like, see my Texas people smell the Texas air. I mean, it is home. It's home, and just thank God I made it back. So I lived with my mom for a couple of months, and I remember coming back and I just sat down at the computer and just wrote down everything that happened and just write and write, write, write, write, write. Because it was all in my brain and some notes, and I just wrote everything down. It was very therapeutic, I guess, just to

put it out there on paper. Not for any purpose of trying to make any book or anything like that, but just to write it down and get it down and think.

This is the beginning of trying to reconcile with my parents, reconcile with my best friend, and reconcile with myself about whether is it safe to cross the street? I've looked both ways 17 times now before I would, it was not anything I thought of because my confidence was there. Just your confidence, totally blown, trying to rebuild that. I sat down, wrote, and then I thought out of sight, out of mind. I can't get in any trouble here. I can't be asked to do something. I can't be, maybe not picked on is the right word, but I definitely don't want the DEA to come over and say, 'Hey, you know what? We need you to do this or We need you to do that.' So I got in a car and drove to Panama with my girlfriend at the time, who became my wife, and sure, shit, as soon as we got to Panama, it was like, all right, you're supposed to be here.

The first year I was there, I made a quarter million dollars doing shit, nothing. Went looking for a spot to surf, and one thing led to another and maybe you weren't supposed to be a trial attorney, maybe you're supposed to be down here in Panama doing this stuff. You bought some land and had a bed and breakfast down there, I think, right? I met a couple of people, and then it was just a crazy story. But yeah, I ended up brokering on a lot of different property deals because I was just there and Panama was blowing up. People wanted to buy property and I mastered the flip or the option where I would option something for a penny and then sell it for \$2, a penny a meter, and then sell it for two bucks a meter. The landowner was happy.

I made a ton of money. The buyer was happy. I mean, that was happening all over for a couple of years. It was gangbusters. I guess I'm lucky, and I know that luck is good or bad, so I'm lucky. I've had 'em both ways. But, I'm sitting in the office in France being questioned by the federal prosecutor from Arizona, the DE agent, an ICE agent, and a couple of other people, and the DE agent looks at me. He is like, oh, you need to get some background from me. Where are you from? Dallas. What school did you go to? I said, A&M. It's like, I bet you were a non-reg. You immediately knew he was in the Corps, right? I said, no, I was a cadet. And he almost has a fucking heart attack, because that dude was a cadet also.

I'm in a French judge's office on the other side of the world, and the guy that's questioning me is a cadet who had been there 20 years before me. Same experience, different time area, different time era, but the same fucking thing. He looks at me, he is like, what the fuck happened to you? And I couldn't answer it. I got greedy, and that's not even a good enough answer. What the fuck happened to you to think that this was a good idea? But him being on the case definitely helped me not get prosecuted in the United States.

Is There Really a Drug War?

Brian Beckcom: I'll just tell people right off the bat, I have very strong feelings about this. I haven't always felt this way, but I feel like the drug war is the dumbest public policy that we've had in the United States ever, other than maybe slavery and some other things that were obviously really bad. But this idea of the war on drugs is the dumbest thing. This is all my opinion, by the way, it's caused

so much problems in certain communities. It's caused the police to be militarized. It has literally destroyed South American countries. I mean, we're constantly bitching about the immigration problem. Why are these people coming over here from Mexico? Because the drug cartels have fucking torched the country.

You know why the drug cartels exist? Because we fucking created them with the war on drugs. So I have a pretty strong feeling about this. By the way, for the law enforcement officers that are listening, I love you guys and girls. I am against the war on drugs. I think we're sending you into an unwinnable war. It's the same thing with Vietnam. At least we were smart enough after 10 years to get the fuck out of that country. When are we going to wake up and realize that we will never win this war, ever? You see these stories on the news all the time, 200 pounds of cocaine seized in New York Harbor. I'm like, cool. We won the drug war now, right? It's over with, right? What I don't understand, Jake, is we did this before in the early 19 hundreds with prohibition and what happened? It created the fucking mafia and all sorts of crime, and it didn't work. We were smart enough to fix it. I don't understand why we can't figure this out and figure out that this shit is not working. We have to have a different approach. So what are your thoughts on the drug war in general?

Jake Banks: Well, let me start by saying this. There is no other crime where the victim asks to be victimized. We'll see somebody out there. Hey, come rob me. Hey, come murder me. Hey, give me drugs. Sell me drugs. So to say that this person is a victim is a little misleading, I think. What is the drug we're fighting? Well, we want to keep people from becoming addicts. We want to keep the drugs off the street from our kids. We want to keep this and that and the other.

That's a good idea. But the people that want to get drugs are going to get 'em because the guy whose cell phone is blowing up all day is the drug dealer. It's because the demand is so high to get the product that he wants, that he's going to sell it. So the drug war, and this is the one thing I don't understand because it's very winnable. Let's talk about heroin. Let's talk about the war on terror and how it overlaps with the war on drugs.

We go to Afghanistan in 2002 or 2003. Since then, there have been 45,000 bombs dropped in Afghanistan. That's a lot of bombs, right? Afghanistan is a little bit smaller than Texas. The Taliban uses the sale of Poppy to finance their terror war that finances the murder of Americans and other civilians around the world with their terror plots. 90% of heroin is grown in Afghanistan since the United States has been there, opium production has increased by 300%. Wow,

Brian Beckcom: I did not know that.

Jake Banks: So what the fuck are we bombing? I mean, we got a satellite in outer space that can tell how big my nose is and how big your fucking head is. But you can't tell me that there's a hundred hectares over there that's grown poppy. Why aren't we going in there, drop some agent orange and all that shit, burn all of their fucking supply of heroin or opium to the ground so that we take out the money that they use for terror, and at the same time, remove the threat of illegal drugs coming onto our streets. Why the fuck didn't we do that? I don't understand it. And it doesn't even take a bomb. It takes a John Deere tractor over there to shred that shit. So why has it not gone from zero production to take out their military effectiveness or their funds for terror and also the drug off the street? It's

gone the opposite way. It's increased. It's increased. So what the fuck are we doing? It's not real. It's not real. It's not a real war. Columbia produces war.

Brian Beckcom: It's not a real war. The other thing, Jake, how do we define winning the war? We are fighting a war. We've been fighting a war for 70 years. Like you said, not only have we not won the war, but there are more drugs out there now. People are using more drugs. So when are we going to wake up and say, we've been doing the same shit for 70 years? Not only have we not fixed this problem, but it's gotten worse. I'll tell you the other thing that really bothers me is, and people can look at the history of this after prohibition ended, a guy named Harry Anslinger. He didn't have anything to do, so he started looking around and saying, I mean, this is a typical government bureaucrat story. If you have a government bureaucracy, the problem is you can never get rid of these bureaucracies.

They have to have something to do, so he starts looking around and he goes, you know what? There's this Mayor that all the blacks and the Mexicans are using. So they start this reefer madness, and they literally planted, made-up stories in the newspapers about how it was making black people rape white women. It was completely racist from the beginning. So fast forward to the sixties when Nixon's president, and there are literally tapes of Nixon talking about using psychedelics like MDMA and others for therapy reasons.

Jake Banks: Up until 1988, MBMA.

Brian Beckcom: There you go. Nixon's talking on tape with one of his campaign advisors, and he says, 'Who does drugs? The minorities and the hippies.' So we're going to start to restart this war on drugs to attack our political opponents. That is the only reason it was started. People that have an idea that we somehow did some sort of scientific study that said, all right, this drug's really dangerous, so we need to make that illegal. None of that happened. It's all political. The vast majority of it, frankly, was pure and unadulterated fucking racism from the very beginning. So it's not surprising to me at all that when you start a war or a public policy that specifically targets certain communities, those communities are going to be negatively impacted by the war on drugs. I mean, the most dangerous drugs in the world right now are stuff like fentanyl and these opioids that you can get with a prescription. This is madness. The idea that cannabis, which has been used for 2,500 years would be on a higher schedule than fentanyl, is absolute an utter insanity, in my opinion.

Jake Banks: Absolutely insane. Especially now, there are 11 or so states that have legalized it, but it's still on a schedule next to heroin and cocaine.

Brian Beckcom: That's what I'm talking about. This is madness.

Jake Banks: There's no medical value to it, and a high probability of addiction.

Brian Beckcom: You can walk into a liquor store, and in five minutes buy enough liquor to kill yourself that night.

Jake Banks: Or is this shit every case that I've ever read involving family violence, there's a form at the bottom of it. Alcohol is involved on the form. Check Yes. Check yes. Check yes. Marijuana

involved. I've never seen a family violence case where marijuana was involved. They're not smoking dope and fighting. They're smoking dope and fighting over some Cheetos, but they're not fighting each other.

Brian Beckcom: It's crazy because, then you've got this complete double standard. Joe Rogan, who I like watching his podcast and stuff, is literally smoking weed and doing mushrooms on air, and nobody says shit or does anything about it. But if you're a poor person in a poor community and you get busted doing literally the exact same thing, your ass is going to jail. So we don't enforce the laws equally. We target certain communities and it doesn't work. I mean, that's the bottom line. Again, I need to say this. I could not be a bigger supporter of law enforcement. My stepmom was an undercover narcotics agent for 30 years. My older brother was an ADPS agent. You and I both have a bunch of friends that are in law enforcement. I'm the biggest supporter of law enforcement in the world, and that's exactly why I think we need to end this stupid fucking war so they can focus on the violence.

Jake Banks: Bad guys, man,

Brian Beckcom: The bad guys, the real bad guys. Come on, man.

Jake Banks: Bad guys. You think, oh, he is a drug dealer. Well, okay, is he a drug dealer? That's one thing. Is he a drug dealer and a murderer? Is he a drug dealer and a murderer and a rapist? Yeah. Because two of those are violent crimes, and one of those is an economic crime. When you put, he's a drug dealer, you automatically think, the term is life. You can go to jail for life for giving people what they're asking you.

Brian Beckcom: Unless you run a corporation and you give hundreds of millions of dollars to various charities, and then you get away with selling opioids. There was a county in West Virginia that had something like a hundred thousand people, and there was something like 30 million opioid prescriptions made in this one county. I mean, the biggest drug dealers in the world are legal.

Jake Banks: Absolutely

Brian Beckcom: Again, if you want to talk about the negative health impacts and the addiction, these prescription drugs, by and large, are far more dangerous than the other drugs. Then the last thing I'll say about this, Jake, is I don't personally believe, and some people may disagree with this, but I don't personally believe the government should be telling people, consenting adults, the fuck they should do. They should have no right to tell me what I can and can't put in my body as long as I'm not hurting somebody else.

Jake Banks: Absolutely.

Brian Beckcom: It's a freedom thing to me. I agree. I want all the libertarians and we all need to be on the same page. This is about individual freedom to me. If you want to be a dumb ass and shoot heroin, you're going to die. That's stupid. Don't do that shit. Okay? But as long as you're not hurting

anybody, man, it's not the government's role to tell you what you can and can't do with your own body.

Jake Banks: I agree. A million percent. You made a point earlier about the two things you thought were the stupidest policies of the United States, slavery and the war on drugs. Those have merged into the prison industrial complex.

Brian Beckcom: Bingo.

Jake Banks: Instead of plantations, they are prisons. Instead of producing a crop where the plantation owner sells the crop at market, the government pays the plantation or the private prison owner because now there are so many private prisons. This is the industry. Now prisons, privately run prisons, are a tremendous industry. They are paying that person, the owner of that prison to house people. That's their crop, that's their product. The reason they're there is just like you said, because the people that are going to prison for drug crimes, it is affecting black and Latino communities at a far more disproportional rate than white people. Has it really changed that much? We're using different words, not a product, but different mechanisms to get to the same point that we were 200 years ago. It's just another way to keep the prisons full because in the prison industrial complex and the military industrial complex, like Eisenhower warned about after World War II, he's like, keep that shit in check because it's going to grow to be outrageous. The US military is bigger than all the other militaries in the world combined by two or three, we're the shit. No doubt, nobody can sniff. Now it's already there in the prison industrial complex. We'll put a prison out here in the middle of nowhere, and now a town is here and now a village is here. Now our Walmart's here and a Whataburger. So wow, if that prison goes away, because we can't keep it full, because we can't keep it stocked with lifers that are there because of drugs, then all this economy from this town is gone. That is the most fucked up thing I've ever heard of, is to make a town off the back of somebody that has been sentenced to life in prison for a crime where the victim wants to be victimized.

Brian Beckcom: It's insane. Alexander Seitan, the famous Russian author, he judges a society by the condition of its prisons. The idea that there are people in this country who profit off of imprisoning human beings is a moral abomination. I cannot believe that in the United States of America, we have allowed ourselves to get to the point where we allow people to literally make tens of millions of dollars in profit for imprisoning human beings. This is a moral issue to me. I don't know if you've ever seen the Netflix documentary the 13th. You got to watch this and everybody listening, please watch it. Because Jake, what you said about the drug war basically being a continuation of slavery, you watch this documentary and that is exactly the thesis of the documentary. I mean, there are contracts right now with private prison companies that require the states to have a certain number of prisoners or they have to pay the company anyway. There are lobbyists, and lobbying companies that literally write the laws for the congressmen. They get paid to write the laws in order to benefit the private prison companies. In my opinion, the private prison industry should be outlawed

Jake Banks: Absolutely

Brian Beckcom: Immediately. And there should never again be any way in the American justice system to literally profit off of throwing human beings in jail. This is a moral issue, and we really need

to fix this. The nice thing, Jake, is this is an issue that I think is becoming very bipartisan. I think there are people on both sides of the aisle that agree that we need massive criminal justice reform, and the private prison industry is part of that. Of course, the problem, as you know Jake, is when you got a big corporation, a big industry making tons of money, they start feeding money. The right politicians. It's very hard to get these laws changed, even if most people agree that they're stupid laws. Right.

Jake Banks: I agree. The whole thing backs up to, oh, we have this prison. It's got a thousand beds. We got to keep these beds full. So backup, when your case goes in front of the judge, you don't get probation. You go to prison because there's a bed for you, and it's got to be filled. I'm not saying that every person that gets busted for a joint, those guys don't go to prison. But to think that you're looking at life in prison for smuggling, but you can rape a child and be out in seven years.

Brian Beckcom: Unbelievable. Fuck you. Unbelievable. This is madness. This has to change. I don't know why people don't connect these dots. Again, I feel pretty strongly about this. I am totally convinced that you could solve the problem of police brutality that we see, you could solve a lot of the problems in some of the poor communities that we see. You could solve a lot of the immigration problems if you would just stop thinking about this as a war. It's a war on human beings. It's not a war on drugs. It's a war on human beings. We need to rethink this and start thinking about this as a medical issue, an addiction issue. Let's try to help people that are having addiction problems. I mean, throwing people in jail for a medical addiction is stupid in my opinion.

Jake Banks: I don't disagree, but we're talking about we've got a war on terror. Yeah, let's go kill all the bad guys. Let's blow up all their stuff. Let's get their money, man. Fucking do it for sure. War on drugs, what does the war on drugs entail? Is it a war? Are we trying to stop the flow of drugs because that's not happening because we're not going down to Columbia or Bolivia or Afghanistan and destroying, cutting the head off the snake. If we destroy the product, the crop pretty much could take a massive advantage in the war on drugs. You would definitely gain some ground thereby destroying the product where it's grown. Are you talking about treatment? Can we have a war where part of the war is to treat these people that think or believe that they need to go do meth and that they need this heroin and get that out of their mind? Is that part of the war? Because I don't see that part.

Brian Beckcom: I don't either.

Jake Banks: If the wars is an all-encompassing thing, there's casualties, there's civilian casualties, and all this other stuff, what part of that war and who's fighting that to address the people that are addicts? There's no doubt. I mean, the DSM says that addiction is a disease.

Brian Beckcom: No doubt.

Jake Banks: There's no doubt. Do we want to get these people treated or do we want to throw 'em in jail? I mean, depends on the situation and every single case. But for fuck's sake, if they'd never get any treatment, they're going to come back and do it again.

Brian Beckcom: You talk about methamphetamines, which are obviously a dangerous drug, very addictive. But we got a lot of kids right now that are getting prescription methamphetamines. I mean, that's what Adderall is, molecularly. Adderall is essentially a form of meth from a molecular standpoint. We give those to kids that have concentration issues and things like that. Nobody says we're giving kids meth because we got a nice little brand name and we got the doctor prescribes it. So it's all good now because we've named it something different, even though fundamentally it's the same thing. In my neighborhood, I know it's the same as your neighborhood. Well, I've got people walking around, they're on all sorts of antidepressants and all sorts of prescription drugs, and these things are addictive. They're dangerous. Most of 'em don't work that well. Now, with that caveat, I totally support anybody that has mental issues that these drugs help. I think there's nothing at all wrong if these drugs help. But the point is, there are people running around my neighborhood, people running around your neighborhood that are on very powerful prescription drugs, but they don't think about that. There's nothing wrong with that to them. Then there's the same person that says, oh, I just busted this poor guy smoking a joint on the court. That guy needs to go to jail. I mean, again, this is a really screwy way of looking at the world, in my opinion. Then you got former US congressman like John Baer, who was a speaker of the house. He was writing laws throwing people in jail, and now he runs a marijuana company. He's on the board of directors of it. I mean, are you kidding me? No wonder people are mad.

Jake Banks: The hypocrisy is overwhelming, and it's so hypocritical that I just can't make heads or tails of it. I can't understand if this is a war, why are we half-assing?

Brian Beckcom: Exactly.

Jake Banks: I know those Marines over there in Kandahar, the troops over there, the pilots and everybody that's fighting a war, they're not fucking dicking around. But the politicians who are in charge of it, I guess, or directing it, don't really want it to end. They don't want it to end. That's right. On drugs was curved back. You're talking about losing private prisons. You're talking about losing courts, losing probation officers, police money that goes to police and money that goes to courts, and all of the things that takes a cop to arrest a dude from smoking a joint to get him to probation or final adjudication. All that money is going to be gone. There's not a single politician anywhere that's going to say, yeah, we're going to go ahead and give that away. They don't want to. They're not going to. It's such a bureaucracy. It's a part of this country now that it's not going away. The only thing we can do is hopefully revise it in some way. That makes sense. You know what, at the end of the day, if you just did your drugs in your house, you would never have a fucking problem. Ever.

Brian Beckcom: Right? Just don't be an idiot and try to smuggle shit from France after losing 50,000 bills. Well, we could talk about this for a very, very long time. Like I said, I've talked to Marine Corps officers, I've talked to some law enforcement officers, a district attorney, I've got a Texas Ranger coming up, and I'm optimistic because I think I talked to a judge here in Harris County, and I think most of our generation at least, believes that we got to rethink this. I mean, we cannot be throwing people in jail and throwing away the key for these medical issues.

Lessons Learned in Life's Regrets

Brian Beckcom: What major regrets do you have in your life?

Jake Banks: Fucking getting involved. Going to France. That's it.

Brian Beckcom: What's the biggest lesson you took out of that?

Jake Banks: How to make a person not greedy, and how you feel about yourself. I came out of there with a different understanding before I felt like my value was somehow entailed to what I had. Then after going there and not having shit, I mean having a pair of shoes on my feet, having a blanket, having shitty ass food, and being thankful for that made me appreciate it a lot more. Not to judge myself by what I had, but by who I am.

Brian Beckcom: I had that same experience, not like yours, obviously, but in January I was sitting there one night and all of a sudden I looked around and I said, you know what? I got everything I need. I got a nice house, a nice family, a nice wife, and a nice car. I played golf with my good buddies, got good friends, and got a great practice. What am I so stressed about? Why do I feel like I need to have more, more and more? I've got enough. It reminds me of a quote I saw one time, two guys were talking and they were talking about some billionaire. Guy one says to guy two, well, I have something he'll never have. Guy two's like, what do you mean you have something? He's a billionaire. What do you have that he doesn't have? Guy one says, I have enough.

Jake Banks: That was the question when the DA asked me, how long was this going to last until there was no end? Because when you think about it, there is not enough, it's just more. What do you need more? What's your end? What number do you need to stop doing what you're doing more? There is no number. This is always chasing, chasing, chasing, chasing, and trying to get something that you already have. When you can sit there and look around and be like, maybe you got a hundred million in the bank. Maybe you got five bucks in your pocket. But if you have that feeling in yourself of like, 'I'm good, people love me, I got family, I got this, I got that. I'm good.' That's all you need. That's it.

Brian Beckcom: That to me, is true wealth. There are two ways to be wealthy. You can go make a bunch of money or you can be satisfied with what you have. I think the second one is a lot easier and frankly, a lot more fulfilling.

Jake Banks: Absolutely.

Brian Beckcom: Well, Jake, this has been an incredible time. The reason I think that you are a perfect guest for Lessons from Leaders is because you went through one of the most traumatic, I mean, you're thinking you're going to spend the rest of your life in jail. Your entire world has collapsed around you. You spend two years, 23 hours a day in a French prison, and you want to talk about resilience. I've really been trying to feature people that show what is one of the top two or three personal skills we need right now, which is flexibility and resilience. You showed that, and you literally took your life when it was the bottom of the well, like the bottom of the bottom, and you dug yourself

out. Now, you got great kids, a great job, and you got a great group of friends. You are a perfect illustration for everybody listening, that no matter how bad things seem, if you just stick with it, finish the semester, and be persistent, ultimately things will get better. I really appreciate your candor. I strongly recommend that people read this book, and this book needs to be a movie bottom line.

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About the Author

[Brian Beckcom](#) is one of the nation's top trial lawyers. He is also a widely published author, including multiple books and hundreds of articles. Brian's interests include technology, consciousness, meditation, physics, mathematics, history, language, stories, narrative, memetic theory, leadership, persuasion, quantum gravitation, computer science, and more. Lessons from Leaders podcast features national leaders, including military officers, national business experts, judges, spiritual leaders, and other guests who have shown leadership during difficult times.