

Shelby Stanger:

Welcome to Wild Ideas Worth Living, Mike Posner.

Mike Posner:

What up, doe?

Shelby Stanger:

What up, dog? Thanks for having us in your-

Mike Posner:

Doe.

Shelby Stanger:

Doe.

Mike Posner:

D-O-E.

Shelby Stanger:

Why not dog, why doe?

Mike Posner:

In Detroit where I'm from, this is like an old thing people used to say when was a kid. What up? They didn't say, "What up?" Everybody there would say, "What up, doe?"

Shelby Stanger:

What up, doe?

Mike Posner:

Now they say, "What's up, baby?"

Shelby Stanger:

What's up, baby?

Mike Posner:

Isn't that kind of crazy?

Shelby Stanger:

It's little weird.

Mike Posner:

It's a little forward, but guys say it to guys. Girls say it to guys. Guys say it to girls.

Shelby Stanger:

So it's like-

Mike Posner:

It's just like hi.

Shelby Stanger:

Universal.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. But I am sticking with, "What up, doe?" Even though it's archaic.

Shelby Stanger:

I like it.

Mike Posner:

And out of style.

Shelby Stanger:

What up, doe? So where are we? This is beautiful.

Mike Posner:

We're in Utah.

Shelby Stanger:

At a beautiful cabin in Powder Mountain.

Mike Posner:

Powder Mountain.

Shelby Stanger:

How did you pick Powder Mountain?

Mike Posner:

I didn't pick it. My friend let me use his cabin here.

Shelby Stanger:

Well done. I really want to talk to you about the walk.

Mike Posner:

Let's talk about it.

Shelby Stanger:

2851 miles from Asbury Park, New Jersey to Venice Beach. Why did you do the walk?

Mike Posner:

Man, I really just wanted to become somebody I was proud of, so I had an inkling in myself that I had more to give than I was. And so I went out there and tried to become kind of like this bad ass super hero version of me. He walked across America, so I wanted to try go become him. And as I did it, I found out I was wrong. I don't have a little more, I have a lot more. When I got to the other side, I didn't crawl into the Pacific Ocean, I sprinted into the ocean. When I finished, I had this feeling not of accomplishment, but of possibility. Like, "Man, if I could do that, what else can I do?"

Shelby Stanger:

On April 10th, 2019, musician Mike Posner started his 2851 mile walk across the United States. The seed for this journey was planted after a few particularly challenging years for the artist. Professionally, he felt stalled as record companies benched entire albums. Personally, he'd been dealing with not only a break up and the loss of his friend, Avicii, but also his father's battle with and loss to brain cancer. After much grappling with life and death, success and plateaus, Mike decided it was time to pursue his own journey, a big, wild idea of a journey: walking across the United States of America. I'm Shelby Stanger, and this is Wild Ideas Worth Living.

Shelby Stanger:

You said you wanted to become someone you were proud of, but you had already done so many things that anybody would be really proud of. So can you talk to me a little bit deeper about why you felt this need to be more proud of yourself?

Mike Posner:

I think it's a personal thing where you know even if you've been successful, or you've accomplished something, you know on the inside, hey, I could do more. Or maybe I'm leaving something on the table. And I just don't want to leave money on the table. I don't want my life to end and-

Shelby Stanger:

Like metaphorically.

Mike Posner:

Correct. I don't want to not find out what my whole potential is. You know? So imagine we're talking right now, and I didn't do the walk. It's just still an idea in my head. But after I did the walk, all these possibilities just opened up for me in my whole life. Before, I felt like I was in a little box. It didn't seem like a box at the time because it was my whole reality. But now, after doing my journey, I realize how small that little box was. Hey, you're Mike. You do these things. This is who you are.

Shelby Stanger:

Which was like, I'm a musician.

Mike Posner:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

What was that box before?

Mike Posner:

Yeah, it's kind of like that. You're going to do an album, do a tour, and that's going to be your life.

Shelby Stanger:

Live in LA.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. You're going to live in LA. You're going to do that. You know what I mean?

Shelby Stanger:

I can see. But you could've done a lot of wild things. But walking across America is a pretty wild goal. Why did you choose to do that? What inspired you to pick that?

Mike Posner:

I don't really know. Just I heard about somebody else doing it about five, six years ago. And I said, "What? You can do that?" And people do it every year. And a lot of them do it in more bad ass ways than me with less support, like the gentleman you talked to, and faster. So that was an interesting thing too. You put yourself into an environment like I did, and the projects you've done, and all of a sudden, you're surrounded by this new community. And so we talk on the ... "Wow, that's a crazy thing you did," but I was in contact with six, seven other people that were either walking or running. Most of them were going faster than me. Most of them had less support than me. So I didn't even really feel that special while I was out there. And so just the paradigm shifts. I was way outside of that box that I was in before.

Shelby Stanger:

If you haven't heard of Mike Posner, I can guarantee you've heard his music. His debut album titled 31 Minutes to Takeoff was released in 2010 and included hits like "Cooler Than Me" and "Please Don't Go." His song, "I Took a Pill in Ibiza," was remixed by EDM duo, Seeb, and subsequently nominated for a Grammy for song of the year in 2017. "Live Before I Die," the song you'll hear throughout this episode is one of Mike's recent releases. And the music video, which we'll include in the show notes, features footage from Mike's walk across America. Can we go back? Your voice is so beautiful. Where did you get into playing music? And how old were you when you started?

Mike Posner:

I started rapping when I was eight years old. I'm 31 now.

Shelby Stanger:

How did you get into rapping at eight? Did someone teach you?

Mike Posner:

Mostly some of my older cousins that rapped. And where I grew up was a suburb of Detroit called Southfield, it's a mostly black suburb. So all my friends, they were all listening to hip hop. That's just

what we were into. And we just screwed around rapping. And everyone, we'd try free styling and stuff. And I think everyone, my buddies, the first time we free styled, they thought, "Oh, that was fun." But I remember being like, "I'm never going to stop doing that. I'm going to get really good at that." And so I just haven't really stopped. And then so just learned how to make beats then when I was 13 or so. When I was 20, I started messing around with singing.

Shelby Stanger:

Do you remember what those early lyrics were when you were eight?

Mike Posner:

No. Everybody always asks me. I don't remember.

Shelby Stanger:

I just can only imagine.

Mike Posner:

They sucked though, for sure.

Shelby Stanger:

But an eight year old lyric would be really funny to go back and listen to.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. I thought I was so good.

Shelby Stanger:

We all do.

Mike Posner:

I thought I was sick.

Shelby Stanger:

But you probably were pretty good.

Mike Posner:

No.

Shelby Stanger:

So then you started singing.

Mike Posner:

I sucked, man, for sure.

Shelby Stanger:

And what happened when you sang your first song? Were you like, "Damn, I'm good"? Or you liked it, you liked the feeling.

Mike Posner:

No, I actually wasn't very good at singing. I'm still not. I'm not going to win any American Idol contests or anything.

Shelby Stanger:

I mean, maybe a Grammy.

Mike Posner:

No, I haven't won a Grammy. I've just been nominated. But I just started playing around basically singing my raps. So I was such a big hip hop fan that I thought I wanted to hear singers sing the way I wanted to hear them sing as a hip hop fan. So I started putting more polysyllabic rhymes in the things I was singing, so things that a rapper would do. So my first big song is a song called "Cooler Than Me." And normally in melodic songs, we just rhyme the last syllable of each line. But I like doing these kind of more complicated internal rhyme schemes. So an example is (singing): You've got designer shades/Just to hide your face. So the shades and face, they both rhyme, so last words of each respective line. But also, designer and hide your, they also rhyme, so there's three syllables rhyming. And I just never really heard anybody sing like that. I heard a million rappers rap like that, but I never heard anybody add melody to those kind of rhyme schemes. So that's when I just started messing around doing that was in college. And that's kind of how it started.

Shelby Stanger:

So in college, you really started. Did you have professional training?

Mike Posner:

That's when I started singing, yeah. No, no. And I sucked. I sucked, for sure. In fact, I just knew how to make beats and produce. And I had a setup very similar to this one that I still have, just not as nice a microphone and stuff. But I sort of just had my laptop and a really cheap microphone. And I'd just record myself. So I knew I just had to do it a million times to where it sounded good to me. But I was not a good singer by any stretch of the imagination. I would just have to sing each kind of part of the song 100 times. In fact, then my songs got popular somehow.

Shelby Stanger:

Wait. So go back. You were at Duke, which I don't think of as a musical school.

Mike Posner:

No.

Shelby Stanger:

So where do you find people to play with and get recognized enough to make a song that was big?

Mike Posner:

There was a couple musicians there that I liked that edited different things. My friend, Eric Hölljes, who's now in a band, Delta Rae, we were in the group together with my buddy Jeff O.

Shelby Stanger:

You guys must've been the hottest thing on Duke's campus.

Mike Posner:

Not at first, but yeah, we built it up.

Shelby Stanger:

I imagine you did okay.

Mike Posner:

We started to build it up. And I remember seeing this Kid Rock documentary when I was a kid, and said he would do one show a year in Detroit, and he'd just build it up the whole year and it'd be incredible. So I tried to just copy that. I didn't do a lot of shows, but then I would do a couple a year and just make them awesome and big. So I was just trying to build mystique around myself, I guess, and just having fun making the music.

Shelby Stanger:

So then you said your first big song, you were going to say something about that.

Mike Posner:

Oh, I was just going to say when it got popular, then they would call me to play on Jimmy Fallon and all these cool TV shows and stuff. But I hadn't even really ever sung the song all the way through because I didn't really know how to sing. Like I said, I was just doing each part until I got it right. So yeah, I was going on TV, but I really had no idea what I was doing. And then years after that, I basically had my first big hit, then my career really stopped. And people would call me a one hit wonder, and I had nothing going. And that's when I really started practicing singing and learned to play guitar and piano.

Shelby Stanger:

And so you took lessons.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. Then I started taking lessons.

Shelby Stanger:

How interesting. That break must've been pretty powerful for you.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. That was amazing because when my stuff first started to take off, I really got really full of myself. And I thought like, "Yeah. I'm the man." And my identity to myself got really wrapped up in being popular and cool and stuff. And then all of a sudden, it wasn't actually all of a sudden, it just kind of petered out. And I wasn't the man. And each day, I was getting less popular and all this stuff. So I had to

confront that. Okay. You're not what you thought you were. Those words don't apply to you anymore, popular. So who are you? And it was difficult at first, but then it was a real gift.

Shelby Stanger:

So you took a break. And then is this when you started writing songs for other people?

Mike Posner:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

So that first time you got recognized, to get big, who found you? Or did you pitch your music that you were able to get on Jimmy Fallon and get big?

Mike Posner:

It didn't really work like that. Nowadays, you just kind of start doing it. And so I started putting my stuff out online, and my stuff started to spread around first at my school at Duke. And then my friends that I went to high school, that they went to other colleges and live in different cities.

Shelby Stanger:

And they spread it.

Mike Posner:

They spread it. And so basically in a few months, I could play shows at almost every college in America.

Shelby Stanger:

And so people were contacting you to play the venues.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. So basically, yeah, I would go there and people knew the words to all the stuff. I was just putting this stuff out for free at the time. So nobody really discovered me, it's just my movement started to happen. And then I got a record deal off the strength of that movement and that kind of thing. And that's kind of how I think probably 99% of artists rise to prominence nowadays. It's not some guy being like, "I'm going to make you a star." I think that does happen every once in a while, but yeah, mostly you've got to get it going on your own now.

Shelby Stanger:

But as a little kid, did you think, "I want to be a musician"?

Mike Posner:

I didn't really think I could. I didn't really think I could. I thought, "Man, I'd just be happy to work in an office at a record label and that'd be cool." I knew I loved music. And I knew even if I had an office job, I'd still be making beats and stuff. But I had no idea that I could actually do it until I just finished high school, and I got a job interning. My mom said, "You better get a job this summer before you go to school, man. You're not going to be in the house bothering me."

Shelby Stanger:

My parents did the same thing.

Mike Posner:

So I got an internship at this hip hop radio station in Detroit called Hot 102.7. it's not a station anymore. And one of the other interns was this guy named Pat Piff. And he was in a group with this guy named Sean. And so they had this thing called Freestyle Friday, where they let rappers from Detroit rap on the radio every Friday. And so I got to go on there and rap with Pat and Sean. And later, Sean became Big Sean, who's a very, very famous rapper now, probably one of the most famous in the world. But at the time, he was just like coming into my mom's basement and we were recording and stuff. Eventually, he got a record deal with Island Def Jam and Kanye West and Good Music. And once he got that record deal, you're like, "This was a guy I rapped with all the time," and it's hip hop, so everybody thinks they're the best. I thought I was the best. So when he did that, I went, "Whoa, I'm better than him." And I would say that if he's here too. I love him. He would say he's better than me. I thought, "I'm as good or better than him, man." I remember it just changed my mind thinking, "Oh, I'm definitely going to get a record deal next." And it just changed my whole life. He's probably sick of me thanking him so much, but if he never did that, I wouldn't be here talking to you because once I wrapped my head around the fact that was, it wasn't maybe in my mind, that was going to happen, it was only about six months until, maybe six or nine months until I too got a record deal. He would go in these meetings with Kanye and stuff. And then once he did it and I actually believed in myself, nine months, I was in a meeting with Jay-Z. And I got a record deal after my junior year in college.

Shelby Stanger:

That's amazing when you believe something and it happens.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. I think that. So the question is: How do you believe that if you don't have a Big Sean? So I think all of us are capable of wrapping our heads around something. So I think a belief, from Esther Hicks, she said, "Belief is just a thought repeated over time." So you just practice this thought. And maybe it's contrary to what you actually believe now. Man, I went 20 years thinking I could never get a record deal, but now I have to convince myself I will. And that doesn't happen like this. But I'll do practices now, if I have dreams, I'll go for a walk. I'll say the same thing, sentence, 15 times, envision it in my head. And it doesn't happen after one day, but you do that for 30 days, 60 days, you start to believe that thing, man. And then it just changes how you ... I don't really believe in there's any magic to it. It's more just like, okay, now that I believe it, I approach everything differently. And things that seemed like dead ends before actually are opportunities. Or I had a rule for myself, if there was even a glimmer of hope in me being somewhere or going somewhere, I have to do it. So I think it just changes how you approach things after. I don't think it's magic. But I think changing your belief, change how you act. And when you change how you act, different shit's going to happen in your life.

Shelby Stanger:

I love that you're also into Esther Hicks and The Law of Attraction.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. Sean put me on that. I remember one time I went to the studio with Big Sean. And he was just glowing. It just felt so good to be around him. I don't know what it was. So I asked him the next day. I

was like, "What's going on with you, man? You seem like you're in a great spot." He was like, "You've got to read this book, Ask and It is Given and The Alchemist." He told me to read those two books.

Shelby Stanger:

So Ask and it is Given is by Esther Hicks. And then the Alchemist is by Paulo Coelho.

Mike Posner:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

Okay. So you're a musician. You have a ton of success. You are nominated for a Grammy. You've written songs for Bieber and Maroon Five. Actually, can I ask you about that?

Mike Posner:

Sure.

Shelby Stanger:

As an artist, creating art for someone else, what was that like?

Mike Posner:

I didn't create it for someone else, so I just create it. And after it's done, sometimes I write a lot, sometimes I'll write 70 songs in a year.

Shelby Stanger:

Wow.

Mike Posner:

Okay. But you're only going to put your 10 or 12 on your album. Okay, so you've got all these other songs. Some of them, I hate, so nothing happens with them. I don't think -

Shelby Stanger:

But you're that prolific that 70 songs will come to you in a year.

Mike Posner:

Sometimes.

Shelby Stanger:

Yeah.

Mike Posner:

Last year, I didn't write as many. But yeah, some years. And sometimes it's just a song that it doesn't fit on your album, doesn't tell the story. Or in my case, when I did those two songs, I was in my phase where I was pretty much shelved. My career was at a standstill. So my record label, they weren't releasing any of the stuff I was doing.

Shelby Stanger:

So these songs are pretty big. It's Boyfriend, which is one of Justin Bieber's biggest songs. Rocky Barnes is in the video, only because she-

Mike Posner:

Who's Rocky Barnes?

Shelby Stanger:

She's this really pretty girl was the model at Body Glove when I worked there, so it's so funny. And then Maroon Five, you wrote Sugar.

Mike Posner:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

Those are huge songs. (singing).

Mike Posner:

(Singing) Sugar! Yeah. I had than in the original, yeah, they didn't put it in. I just make the songs. And both of those songs I did with friends of mine. And either they didn't fit, or those cases where mine wasn't even really able to put out music. So I let other people hear them, and if they love them, they take them. They change things here and there to make it fit for themselves, and it's all good. But I can't write for somebody else. I can't go, "I'm going to write a song for Rihanna today." I don't know how to do that. I just know that stuff comes out of me, and then sometimes it ends up in a different place.

Shelby Stanger:

And so do you keep a pen and paper by your bed? What happens when you're in the water and an idea comes to you? Or you're skiing and you don't have paper, do you just keep repeating it over and over in your head?

Mike Posner:

No. Sometimes, usually the phone though. You make a voice note or just write in the notes.

Shelby Stanger:

Does this happen a lot? Where do songs come to you?

Mike Posner:

Sometimes, sometimes not. Sometimes it can be eight months, I get no ideas. And then sometimes two weeks, it's like 1000 songs come out. You're like, "Oh, my gosh. I'm in the zone right now." When I'm in the zone too, I don't shave. I don't do nothing. I don't turn this stuff off. All the stuff stays on all night. I don't mess with anything.

Shelby Stanger:

So you know the magic is just coming to you, and you just stay in the moment and harness it.

Mike Posner:

Yeah, and just ride the wave, man.

Shelby Stanger:

We're definitely taking you surfing. This is what's so interesting to me. You're not the kind of guy that goes and says, "Okay. I'm going to get to my desk at 8:00 and just make music today." It just comes to you, and then when it's coming to you, you keep the lights on basically.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. Keep going, keep going.

Shelby Stanger:

That's a really interesting process.

Mike Posner:

It's not always like that. Sometimes it'll be like, "Hey, man. So and so wants to work with you," maybe some dope producer or some dope artist. And then the managers are putting you on the schedule and you got to show up that day and make something. So I can do that too. But when I'm just living my life, yeah, I just let it come.

Shelby Stanger:

Being a star musician isn't easy. Mike felt like sometimes it could all be a bit of a circus. After releasing and promoting his album, *A Real Good Kid*, in early 2019, Mike was ready for a change of pace. When we come back, Mike and I dive deeper into the challenges and triumphs of his walk across the United States, including his encounter with a rattlesnake.

Shelby Stanger:

Here at Wild Ideas Worth Living, we're big fans of taking the path less traveled. And when it comes to chasing down audacious dreams, we've found it helps to have a pair of trusty sandals that go the distance. One of our faves, the new Universal Trail sandal from Teva. Born on the shores of the Grand Canyon in 1984, Teva has always encouraged exploration. They've injected the same trailblazing spirit into their newest sport sandal. Crafted with quick dry materials and a comfortable, foot hugging neoprene lining, the sandal's versatile Vibram outsole can tackle any terrain from sidewalk to switchback. But the best part, starting in 2020, 100% of Teva's iconic straps are made using recycled plastic, reducing environmental impact so future generations are free to explore. That's over nine million plastic bottles kept out of landfills and put to better use by strapping sandals to your feet. So keep an eye out for the Universal Trail sandal this spring, with select colors available exclusively at REI or on rei.com.

Shelby Stanger:

When the plans started to come together for Mike's walk across the country, he had high hopes, meeting up with fans, performing shows, and releasing new music along the way. And he did do a lot of that. A song came out every single time Mike crossed a state border. But he also realized slowly that the huge undertaking he'd signed up for, the physical and mental challenges of walking, well, they started to take their toll. So let's go back to the beginning, April 10th in Asbury Park, New Jersey, home of

musician, Bruce Springsteen. So why did you start in Asbury Park, New Jersey, which is Bruce Springsteen land?

Mike Posner:

Correct. I started there because originally I was going to talk to Detroit, where I'm from, so I was looking for a straight line from the East Coast to Detroit. So it kind of put me in the New York, New Jersey area. Secondly, it was very important for me personally to start my walk in the actual ocean and end it in the actual ocean. So I didn't really start in ... I don't like saying I started in New Jersey. I got started in the water.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, that's so cool.

Mike Posner:

Did the whole thing. So I needed a place where there was actual beach you could go. Manhattan was out because you can't swim there. So I knew Asbury Park had an actual beach I could get into. Yeah, man, so there was a bunch of towns on that eastern seaboard. And the only one I really recognized that had a beach was Asbury Park. I like Bruce, so I was like, "Yeah, might as well start there."

Shelby Stanger:

What songs of Bruce influenced you most?

Mike Posner:

I don't know how much they influenced me, but my favorite ones are ... There's one called Going Down. (singing). That one. And I like (singing). I like that one.

Shelby Stanger:

You have such a good voice.

Mike Posner:

Thank you. Thank you.

Shelby Stanger:

Okay. So on that walk, not every day was easy. You started in New Jersey.

Mike Posner:

No, no days were easy, man.

Shelby Stanger:

How many miles a day did you do, like 30?

Mike Posner:

I got up to 30 at the end.

Shelby Stanger:

That's a lot.

Mike Posner:

That's the most I got.

Shelby Stanger:

But 15 a day is a monster walk.

Mike Posner:

Most of the time, I'd say my average was probably 24. I started out just eight, but within a month or so, I was doing 20. And then I did that for probably a month and a half, then went up to 24. And then I did 24 a long time, and then at the end, I started getting up to 30s. The very end. I was bummed too because I was like, "Man, I'm just getting good at this."

Shelby Stanger:

And then it ended.

Mike Posner:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

Okay. So day 114 into your hike, you're in Eastern Colorado. You're pretty close to the end. August. You get bit by a rattlesnake.

Mike Posner:

Yeah.

Shelby Stanger:

Crazy.

Mike Posner:

My buddy.

Shelby Stanger:

Your buddy.

Mike Posner:

My little buddy.

Shelby Stanger:

Not many people would talk about a rattlesnake as their buddy. What does it feel like? Not many people in the world have gotten bitten by a rattlesnake!

Mike Posner:

Maybe I needed a break, man. It wasn't all bad. How did it feel? It felt just like two little maybe wasp stings at first. That's the initial feeling, the bite. Pain isn't that bad from the actual bite. And then I was just sitting there, and I'm joking around waiting for the ambulance and stuff. I'm like, "Oh, yeah. This is not that bad. It just felt like two little wasp just stings." But then the venom started to go through me, I think. And it felt like ... Do you remember the Looney Tunes at the end when the circle gets smaller? And they'd say, "That's all, folks." That's how I felt. It just felt like darkness coming in from the edges of my whole awareness, like I was fading away, fading out. And that kind of going away. I felt like I was just totally disappearing, yeah, fading out is the best way I could explain it. And then I kind of snapped back and go, "Whoa." And that happened two times, once when I was waiting for the ambulance, once when they first put me in the ER. That's how it felt. But then, man, I was in the AC. You've got to understand. I was in the trenches, man. It was August. It was hot. My feet hurt. I was alone. Most of the time I'm walking, I'm alone. Every once in a while, a fan or somebody would show up before then, and they'd walk with me. Or my friend would come for a few days. But 90% of the time, you're out there alone, 12 hours a day walking, man. So then I was in the hospital. I was in the air conditioning, nice bed, nurses around, so it wasn't all bad.

Shelby Stanger:

You're like, "This is like the Four Seasons."

Mike Posner:

It was actually much harder than the bite itself was getting better from the bite and realizing, okay, you can't just sit here and soak in all this sympathy anymore. You need to get off your ass and go back to Colorado and walk 1000 more miles. That was the hardest part because I just wanted to stay there, and people were cooking for me, you know.

Shelby Stanger:

How long were you out from the bite?

Mike Posner:

I was out three weeks. I was in the hospital five days, and then they sent me home. I went home to Michigan. And so I was there a couple more weeks. And yeah, first I couldn't even barely walk to the bathroom. I had a walker and stuff.

Shelby Stanger:

I read that. You had to teach yourself to walk again.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. That might be a bit of-

Shelby Stanger:

Maybe hyperbole.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. Hyperbolic. But that's true to some extent. I had to first just walk to the bathroom and walk to the kitchen. Then eventually, I was walking down the street. And then I was getting up to one mile, two miles. I got up to eight miles at home, and I was like, "All right. Let me stop walking at home, man. These miles don't count. Let me get back on the thing. I've got 1000 more to knock out."

Shelby Stanger:

That last 1000 must've been ... Was it more fun than the other thousands?

Mike Posner:

It was a lot different. I think it was the day before I got bit by that snake, I met a guy named Stevie, and he was running across America the opposite way. So basically imagine us two guys. I started in the Atlantic Ocean. He started in the Pacific. And we crossed paths.

Shelby Stanger:

That's so cool.

Mike Posner:

That was pretty powerful to be with him. And he basically took a day off from his run and walked with me west.

Shelby Stanger:

So he went backwards.

Mike Posner:

That's what I'm saying. I was like, "Man, Stevie. You seem like a nice guy, but I ain't going east though." But he was a gangster, man.

Shelby Stanger:

So he went west with you.

Mike Posner:

He went west with me. And he was just telling me. He was like, "Do you listen to music?" I was like, "Man, occasionally. But a lot of times, I call my friends when I'm walking. I do the first eight miles silent as a meditation." And he goes, "Well, I didn't bring headphones." I'm like, "What?" He's said, "Yeah. I didn't bring headphones. I just wanted to go deep with myself. And at first, it was horrible, but now it's amazing." So when I was back home Michigan when I got bit by a snake, and I'm resting, and I decided, man, when I go back to finish my walk, I'm going to do it better. I don't want to just finish it. I got this time off. Let me refocus in. So I was like, "Man, for these last 1000 miles, I'm going to be ... I'm not going to ever listen to music, ever use my phone while I walk. And I'm not going to ... I'm going to be celibate. I'll just be locked in, man, for these last 1000 miles. I just want to do it." And it was just a beautiful experience, man. My mind, it lined up, man. I went to places I didn't know I could go in my mind, and was able to just slow it down. Just reality just showed up differently sometimes. You'd be out there walking, man, it was beautiful. It was beautiful, all thanks to Stevie, though.

Shelby Stanger:

That's so interesting. What sort of things did you really focus on? I know I read your dad had passed just a few years before, and I'm so sorry.

Mike Posner:

That's okay.

Shelby Stanger:

Losing your dad sucks. I lost my dad pretty young, suddenly to a heart attack. And your dad died of brain cancer.

Mike Posner:

Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, that's heavy. Did you think about him?

Mike Posner:

Man, that's a lot of hours out there, so I'm sure I thought about him some of the time. But my dad would show up when I was on my walk. He'd show up in a lot of my dreams.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh interesting.

Mike Posner:

I don't know why, but he'd show up in a lot of my dreams a lot. But I was walking, I learned how to play songs in that part without the headphones. I learned how to play songs in my head. It's different than ... I don't know. It's different. I could literally go, "I want to listen to Dave Matthews Band, So Much To Say," I could just play that song in my head perfectly. I would just listen to it, and I could listen to it again. So I'd do that a lot.

Shelby Stanger:

What was the best piece of gear you had when you were on your walk?

Mike Posner:

Best piece of gear.

Shelby Stanger:

Like so you didn't blister, the right shoes, the right socks.

Mike Posner:

Oh. I used a foot glide every day. I used REI liner socks, silk liner socks, every day. But I still got blisters, man.

Shelby Stanger:

It's inevitable when you walk that much.

Mike Posner:

Walking a lot, man. I was walking a lot.

Shelby Stanger:

Were there a pair of shoes that you really liked that helped?

Mike Posner:

Yeah, those Salomons I used. I would get blisters on the back of my right heel, something about the way I walked. If you look at the shoe ... Well, I gave away all the shoes or threw them out, can't remember. But there'd be a hole in the back right heel. Something about the way I walk my right foot. I wear these tights, man, the ones I'm wearing now. I have a few pairs of those.

Shelby Stanger:

I'm really into the man tights.

Mike Posner:

When I started, I would always wear these tights because I was afraid of ticks on the East Coast.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, smart. So they're white tights, white skin tight tights. Don't worry, he's wearing shorts over them.

Mike Posner:

And then it got really hot. It started to get hot for real in Missouri. And I was like, "You know what, shorts are coming off," so I was just wearing straight white tights.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, you just wore the white tights.

Mike Posner:

Yeah, for 2000 miles.

Shelby Stanger:

That's gangster.

Mike Posner:

It was a super ag look. But it was like, man, people got to understand, I'm alone out here with this heat. You know?

Shelby Stanger:

Did you walk with poles?

Mike Posner:

I walked with poles most of the time.

Shelby Stanger:

And you liked them.

Mike Posner:

I mean, I probably did 1000 miles with them, and then I ditched them for maybe 800 miles, and I brought them back. But so when I got bit by the snake, I wasn't using them. And when I came back, I wanted to bring them back. I thought, "Man, if a snake comes, maybe they'll bite the pole instead of me." And so I used them the last third of so of my walk, mostly for protection because a lot dogs run up on you too.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, shoot.

Mike Posner:

When you're in the country, obviously people didn't tie up ... Why would you tie up your-

Shelby Stanger:

What do you do when the dog run up?

Mike Posner:

I poked my pole out at it and say, "Stay back." I'd have one pole out like this and then I have another pole cocked over my head ready to hit it if it comes at me, but I never had to hit it.

Shelby Stanger:

That's good.

Mike Posner:

Also had dog spray on me.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, interesting.

Mike Posner:

Yeah, those dogs, man, they come at you.

Shelby Stanger:

That would freak me out.

Mike Posner:

You've just got to imagine you're on a road that nobody's ever walked down. And three cars drive on it per month.

Shelby Stanger:

Terrifying.

Mike Posner:

And here you are, this yucko putz walking down, the dogs lose it.

Shelby Stanger:

Yucko putz.

Mike Posner:

These dogs lose their minds.

Shelby Stanger:

That's so scary. So this walk was a wild idea to the fullest. And I love that line you talk about where you say, one, you have this song, I Want to Live Before I Die. Is that a song from the walk?

Mike Posner:

No, that's actually a song, and this happens sometimes in my life multiple times, I wrote this song maybe six years ago. But it just applied to my life more now.

Shelby Stanger:

How interesting.

Mike Posner:

It happens sometimes.

Shelby Stanger:

But then you also talked about wanting to make yourself proud. And so when you got to Venice Beach and you jumped in the water, it had to feel really freaking good.

Mike Posner:

It was a really interesting feeling. It felt ... I can't remember if I said this earlier, but I didn't feel accomplished. I felt wonder and possibility. I didn't feel at all like, "Oh, I'm done. I did it." I didn't feel 0% of that. I felt like, "Wow. Now what can I do? Man, look what I proved to myself. I walked from the Atlantic Ocean here. This is amazing. I could do anything. Anything." And so I think myself and most people, we underestimate the wonder and the peace and the possibility on the other side of a lot of suffering, because make no mistake about it, anybody that's ... You talked to that gentleman who did the run, it's hard. I mean, there's days I woke up, my feet hurt so bad I thought they were broken. I would stand up, barely be able to stand up some days and be like, "How am I going to walk 20 miles today?"

Mike Posner:

But that was the beauty. I felt that pain and decided to keep going anyways. And I did it. So that wonder and that achievement, that peace, that possibility is on the other side of that suffering. Who I wanted to

be, that superhero, that bad ass version of me, he's on the other side of that suffering. You've got to go do that, feel that suffering, and you can be him.

Shelby Stanger:

I love what Mike said about the feeling he got when he finished his walk. It wasn't one of accomplishment, but more one of possibility. That ending for him was another beginning. When you realize that you can do something, whether it's a short hike, or a workout class, or any huge feat, that experience can open your eyes even wider to all the adventures that are out there waiting for you. These days, Mike has turned his focus to the mountains. And now you're living in Utah in this beautiful mountain town. And you're climbing more mountains.

Mike Posner:

That's right.

Shelby Stanger:

Some people would walk across America and be like, "Peace out. I'm done. I'm hitting the couch." You, no.

Mike Posner:

I really had no interest in becoming a fat, old, white dude who talks about that one time I did that cool thing, I did that walk. I have no interest in that. I'm more likely to use the walk as fuel for what I want to do next. And not all those things are physical because a lot of them are more intellectual or artistic. But I just like using the momentum to roll into the next thing. I'm 31. I'm just like, "Yeah. I did it."

Shelby Stanger:

You're young.

Mike Posner:

Actually be 32 in ... What's today? The 1st?

Shelby Stanger:

It's the 1st.

Mike Posner:

11 days.

Shelby Stanger:

Awesome.

Mike Posner:

February 12th.

Shelby Stanger:

Well, happy early birthday.

Mike Posner:

Thank you.

Shelby Stanger:

What are you going to do?

Mike Posner:

I'll be in the mountains, Colorado.

Shelby Stanger:

Doing another activity?

Mike Posner:

Yeah. I think we're doing kind of like a ski hut trip.

Shelby Stanger:

Oh, cool.

Mike Posner:

It's back country skiing.

Shelby Stanger:

Is it a man's trip.

Mike Posner:

I don't know. Ask my coach. He's organizing it all.

Shelby Stanger:

I'm just curious that you have a coach.

Mike Posner:

I'm learning to mountaineer, so he teaches me about that, man. Dr. Jon Kedrowski.

Shelby Stanger:

Great. So you have a coach that's helping you with mountaineering.

Mike Posner:

Yes, yes.

Shelby Stanger:

That's so bad ass.

Mike Posner:

For sure, I wouldn't go on these mountains with coach alone, no way, man.

Shelby Stanger:

What drew you to the mountains? Where does that desire to climb mountains come from?

Mike Posner:

I think, man, like I said, I went to camp when I was a kid in Colorado. And we used to go climb mountains. And I just thought it was so amazing.

Shelby Stanger:

That's so dope.

Mike Posner:

And I kind of knew it was always something I was going to go back to. And so when I finished my walk. It was like, "Man, if that's on your list, you should probably do it now. You should get into it now."

Shelby Stanger:

So already when you got back, you did two mountains. Which mountains did you do?

Mike Posner:

I went on Mount Hood, I went on Mount Adams.

Shelby Stanger:

Mount Hood and Mount Adams.

Mike Posner:

Uncompahgre Peak, Mount Elbert.

Shelby Stanger:

Dude, you've climbed a lot of mountains.

Mike Posner:

I was just trying to work with coach, man.

Shelby Stanger:

I love this.

Mike Posner:

Trying to show up.

Shelby Stanger:

I want to ask you. What happens after a journey like this? We've had so many athletes and adventurers who come on this show, and they've done something big. And afterwards, there's often this huge high, and then there's so much focus and-

Mike Posner:

You get depressed.

Shelby Stanger:

Yeah. You get this low.

Mike Posner:

Yeah. This is the hard thing. People go, "How does it feel?" I was like, "You don't even know. I don't even know yet." So I was in LA, but somebody gave me an apartment to stay in, and I just disappeared. I turned my phone completely off for two or three days. I went out and stuff. I went to yoga. I went to the grocery store and stuff, but I just wrote and just wrapped my head around what I did and how I felt about it. And then after those three days, I went to stay with one of my good friends, Chad Mouton. Chad's special because he tells me like it is, man. So when you walk across America, you get in your own head a lot. You're in your own universe. So I knew Chad would be, if I was being weird, he'd be like, "Dude, you're being weird right now. You need to ... " And he did it a couple times. He's like, "Would you like to start thinking about somebody other than yourself today?"

Shelby Stanger:

I like this friend.

Mike Posner:

Yeah, he's the man. So I knew I could get that from him, so I went and stayed with him and his wife and his daughter for it was five days, six days. Just in their little apartment, I was staying. His daughter slept with her parents, so I was just in her room, in bunk beds, mad stuffed animals and stuff.

Shelby Stanger:

That's awesome.

Mike Posner:

That's what I needed, to be around him and them. I thought I was going to get pretty depressed or low, like you said, and I really didn't. I really didn't.

Shelby Stanger:

Probably being around a little kid and a family was helpful.

Mike Posner:

And just working on something else, do something else.

Shelby Stanger:

Any advice to people who ... Everybody listening to this podcast has a wild idea. Some of them feel stuck. Some of them, for whatever reason, they can't make it happen. Any advice on how to make a wild idea happen?

Mike Posner:

You're going to die. I'm going to die. You're going to die. Everybody listening to this is going to die. So you've just got to decide you want that thing to be part of your experience in this life or not. And if you do, you've got to do it now. Everybody wants you to forget you're going to die. Why? Because then you waste time doing what they want you to do. You go work for their company, make money to buy shit that they're selling. And you need to take back some sovereignty over yourself. And you do that I think by remembering that this doesn't last forever. So me, myself, my idea that we've been talking about a lot that was probably the coolest thing I've done in my life that changed who I am. I put that off for five years. Why? Because I thought, "Oh, I'll get to it later." And it wasn't until my dad died and a couple of my friends died, I realized, man, I've got to do that now. So I bring my five year wait period up as an example of how not to be. Don't be like me. Don't put it off for five years, now is the time. You're either going to do it or not. And whatever reason you have for not doing it is probably an excuse. So when I was walking, I met so many people like, man, I got this thing I want to do, but I'm too old. And I'd meet somebody else a few days later. I want to do this, but I don't have enough time. And I'd meet somebody else, I want to do this, but I don't have enough money. All those reasons are really excuses. And I had my own reasons/excuses for five years. So I think it's easy for somebody to listen to this and go, "Oh, it must be nice. Easy for you to say, Mike. You're a successful musician. You can do whatever you want." But if you look at the people who've walked across America, none of them are successful musicians except me. And there's people that do it every year, and most of them don't have any money. That didn't stop them. So what's your excuse? Don't look at whoever's doing it and pick apart why they're different than you. They're not different than you. So you've just got to make a decision what kind of life you want to live, a normal one or an extraordinary one.

Shelby Stanger:

Do it now. Don't make excuses. Don't say, "I'll do it when this happens, or I'll do it when I've accomplished that other thing." Just go. Pursue the adventures that you've always dreamed about. In doing so, you'll discover you have more potential than you realized. Thank you so much to Mike Posner for having us at your house, or your friend's house in Utah, running around in the snow with me, letting us eat your peanut butter. I totally appreciate your vulnerability and your humor in our conversation. And I'm addicted to your music. You can also check out Mike's music and you can follow his latest adventures on Instagram at @MikePosner, where you can follow him doing ice bass, climbing mountains. I mean, the guy is doing so many great things. Join us week after next as I talk to climber, Jesse Huey, about finishing a route started by his late friend, Hayden Kennedy. Wild Ideas Worth Living is part of the REI Podcast Network. It's hosted by me, Shelby Stanger, written and edited by Annie Fassler and produced by Chelsea Davis. Our executive producers are Paolo Mattola and Joe Crosby. As always, we appreciate when you subscribe, rate and review the show wherever you listen. I read all the reviews, and some of them are super funny. But I hope you remember some of the best adventures happen when you follow your wildest ideas.