

Wynne Leon (00:04)

Welcome to how to share a podcast featuring conversations about courage, connection, and choosing to make a difference.

I'm Wynne Leon and in this episode, I'm with special missions aviator and author, Anthony Dyer. And we're talking about his memoir, Moon Child. Anthony tells us how he went from a childhood in Appalachia to becoming a special missions aviator in the US Air Force. We talk about how his desire to make a difference in the world led to a 20 year career in the military. Anthony reveals how he healed from the visible

and invisible wounds of war, healing by picking up a pen instead of a bottle. He tells us how he met his wife and what their mission is now. Anthony has so many incredible insights about how to live fully, heal, and integrate traumatic experiences. He tells us what motto is inspiring him today. This is a great episode with an insightful author who takes life by the horns. I know you'll love it.

you

Hi Anthony!

Anthony Dyer (01:29)

Hey, how's it going, Wynne? Thanks for having me.

Wynne Leon (01:32)

So good to talk with you because I loved your book, Moon Child I mean, it's got so much in there, you know, starting with being a special missions aviator in the US Air Force and so much from, you know, that experience and then the next stages after that. So can you tell the story of how you went from growing up in Appalachia to becoming a special missions aviator in the US Air Force?

Anthony Dyer (02:01)

Yeah, no problem. I was born April 7th of 82 and they had a small town called Silver, North Carolina. It's deep and I think the biography says like rugged Appalachia there and you know under under a full moon and I'll get more into that later. But yeah, you know, it's a place where the sense of community is strong and you know, I think we're talking about a little bit of sort of how like Tacoma sort of Washington reminded me of the back home a little bit. But yeah, just mountain people, you know, there's a lot of like Scott Irish and ancestral ties back there.

also 20 minutes away from the Eastern Band of Cherokee Nation. was awesome melting pot of all these different cultures and parts of the community. it's some of those places where like your word is your bond, know, a handshake is a contract type thing. And everybody had everybody's back. it's some of those things where like everybody knows everybody's business as well. Right. And that's where that's good or bad depends on the

situation, I guess. But yeah, and I wanted to go fishing. literally just walked half a mile down the road to the Tuckaseegee River. You know, it's beautiful, all the coniferous trees and stuff like that. then, you know, I get

almost 18 and my senior year in high school. Dad gives me the cliche dad talk of like, it's time to either get a job, go to college or get out. You're about to be a grown man and all that. so was like, man, this is a lot right now. And I know I didn't have the grades really for college. I didn't want to go. And so I talked to a Navy recruiter at first and then an Army recruiter. I was like, you know what? I'm going talk to my dad sort of about the quality of life at Air Force and about the TDYs and the golf clubs and everything that comes with that and good shot holes. And he sold me at that point. there I was on my

First fixed wing flight ever from Charlotte, North Carolina to San Antonio, Texas and just sort of seeing what the world's got,

Wynne Leon (03:34)

Yeah, tell me TDYs are...

Anthony Dyer (03:36)

I'm sorry, it's a temporary duty like that. Like basically you would go training somewhere. Let's say for example, we went to Las Vegas for like red flag type training or something like that.

Wynne Leon (03:45)

Got it. Got it. Thank you. And it's funny because you talk about growing up and going to school in your book and write beautifully about it. And there was a teacher that said, you're not going to get paid for looking out the window. Is that right?

Anthony Dyer (03:59)

Yeah. Yeah. She said, you'll never make a living looking out a window. And, which was, I thought about that every, especially on the AC 130, we, you know, mostly fly at night. And, I was thinking about that, looking at just the whole world below me, you know, staring out this window with NVGs and, know, and I just would always go back to that moment to where, like, you know, it could either mean like, Hey, you're not going to make it. And so it gives me something to like motivate, right. To get out of that place and just make a difference in the world. You know, and I, I learned at a very young, young age that, know, you can't take anything with you.

when you die and we start dying the moment we're born, right? So, might as well leave somewhat of a big footprint on the earth and, you know, do the best you can for humanity.

Wynne Leon (04:35)

Well, and that your sense of wanting to do big things, wanting to make a difference, this comes so through so clearly in your book. And I love that about it. I want to talk about a

little bit about your training because I love the part, the point that you make that there's three things that you, the fundamental things for keeping your cool and in the aircraft in the air, you've got to aviate.

navigate and communicate. I love that because it you you kind of have that you have a lot of rules of three in in your book but that's one that just really stuck with you me because it really true right?

Anthony Dyer (05:16)

Yeah, yeah. And I think, the aviate part, like we have this thing is called an emergency procedure, like mantra, like a basically like an acronym, right. And, know, like, like aviate, like, so maintain aircraft control. Like, so no matter what you're doing in the situation, how bad it is getting right here, like, okay, I'm still flying. I'm so good. I'm so maintaining that control and then navigate. It's good to know where you come from. But, know, in my eyes, it was always more important to know where you're going. Right. And communicate if you have something's going on in your life and there's different ways to communicate with those that are close to us and just, just

to spread that word and tell someone, you know, it's okay. And I like to add to, know, as far as the perseverance, like, you know, I tell people my first flight on a 130 gunship went so bad as a funny moment in the book there when the instructor said, you know, he's like, you're the reason you to need seat belts on airliners, right? And he's like, yeah, it went that bad. And we get towards the end of the flight and he sees me licking my wounds or whatnot. And he's like, Hey, what's the most important word in the world in the dictionary? was like, you don't even know where I'm at right now, right?

He's like perseverance. like, want you to think about that word before next flight and come back ready to fight. And, you know, and there's moments of flying, especially Henry Ford said, you know, an aircraft takes off against the wind, not with it. So you can translate that to life and like, you know, all these situations in a way they elevate you and give you lift.

Wynne Leon (06:31)

Right, Aircraft takes off against the wind. I've never thought of that. That's so interesting. It's like salmon swimming upstream.

Anthony Dyer (06:39)

Exactly, yeah. if, you know, cause you know, taking off you want a headwind to sort of give you that lift, right? With the flaps and everything. then, you know, flying you want a tailwind cause you can save more fuel if you think about it that way. ~ things I've learned.

Wynne Leon (06:52)

~ so good. So one of the incredibly harrowing stories you tell is of a rescue mission. And as you tell it, we feel the physical and mental demands so clearly in your account. What's equally as impressive is the work that you've done to recover from those visible and

invisible wounds of war. Can you tell us about the healing that you've done as you've returned to civilian life?

Anthony Dyer (07:19)

Yeah, no problem. my last year I was in, was getting prolonged exposure therapy treatment with a psychologist. And what that is is honestly sort of like we're doing now. We're just having a conversation, you and you start out writing the part of trauma that, know, particularly that mission with me, right? And they get to the root of that. So basically we were comfortable, we were uncomfortable talking about it. And, the first time I told the story, I cried, the psychiatrist cried, you know, she's like, you should tell your story over and over. Told me a hundred times. And I always said no.

Once I applied for this blanket DD 214 saying, Hey, I served for 20 plus years and all that. And I realized walking out of that personnel type office, there's no door handle on the other end of that door. So you can walk out, but you can't really get back in this thing, right? This machine keeps going, you know? And so I, when the dust settled, was like, you know what, like instead of picking up a bottle, like I'm going to pick up a pen. And at this point, my wife, gave me the ultimatum of like, you know, it's either the bottle or me and your daughter and, know, and thank God I chose her and my daughter. And I, that's I really started.

writing and sort of seeing the therapeutic part of it, you know, and just I would whatever was beside my nightstand, a piece of paper, napkin, write it down and wake up and try to make sense of two decades of war and everything that comes with that. And next thing you know, man, I got a book in hand. it was a, you know, sort of fast and furious and didn't expect it, but it happened.

Wynne Leon (08:37)

Yeah, that's amazing. And it's just the power of writing of that vulnerability that you show as you write and telling your story over and over again. And then you come on a podcast and you have to do it all over again.

Anthony Dyer (08:54)

I enjoy it now and something I regret talking about has actually become a way of healing in itself. And you sort of see the fruits of the labor with writing and the point, people ask me, write the book. I'm like, well, it's like, if one person gets help from reading this story, that's a blessing. So it is therapeutic. think helping is healing.

Wynne Leon (09:13)

I think I couldn't agree more. But one of the things that I love the way you talk about your wife and your daughter, I they shine so beautifully in your writing. Can you tell us about how you met your wife and she played a part in that healing?

Anthony Dyer (09:29)

yeah, so growing up back where I grew up, know, I fell in love real early age with the Native American culture and just, you know, awesome food, awesome people and just so many, you know, such a good moral compass, you know, and sort of lessons I learned from them, even, you know, growing up took with me. And then, you know, there was a lot of terminology like verbage you would only hear on like, like those, you know, the reservations and stuff. And I remember like, we were playing basketball, I just got home from a deployment and they've been home 12, 14 hours and.

She was going to ENMU the Greyhounds in Portales, New Mexico and and my buddy said hey He's like you want to play some ball and then have a barbecue after and it was really more about the the girls and it was the you know playing ball and all that yeah Yeah, it's so and I remember there's this overpass that you know separates the that gym from the rest of the school we were walking back across there and and I just remember her saying things like scode in as in let's go then or students as in let's do this is you know highlighted and was that show reservation dogs there with Willie Jack, but

She said that, and I asked her, I'm like, hey, do you happen to be Native American? And she just smiled. And just that moment, the sun and everything, I know it sounds cheesy, man, but they say when you know, you know, and I knew it. And there was definitely six months of, I don't know, so getting out of the friend zone and earning that trust and everything. But yeah, she's the best thing that's ever happened to me.

Wynne Leon (10:46)

Right? you got out of the friend zone because you showed up for her.

Anthony Dyer (10:50)

Yeah, yeah, it's true. That's a guy. If you listen, there's hope out there for the friend zone. You can climb out eventually, but yeah, yeah. She blessed me with a beautiful baby girl, you know? And it was, think at the point the name, you know, her name Sullivan in a book I talk about where like I learned it in the old Gaelic, uh, the old Irish language, if you will, that she would probably have brown eyes, right? Cause her mom was native. And, so, uh, Sullivan means dark eyes and the old Irish language. she's just, like I said, the biggest joy I've ever ever had in my life is her.

Wynne Leon (11:19)

Yeah. And I want to jump back to that. one of the things that you've made the point is of the sort of the healing. ~

Rituals and wisdom that come from the Native American background too, right? I mean your your wife was steeped in that

Anthony Dyer (11:39)

yeah. Yeah. And there's the, you know, the two wolves I subscribe to that, that, that theory of, of just life, know, like basically saying, Hey, you have the story goes, you have two,

every man and woman has two wolves, right? And you have one that's positive and a motivating thoughts. have one that's negative and, always down type of thoughts. And, know, the, saying is the one that wins is the one you feed the most, you know, that's the wolf that wins. And so if you look at that life with sort of that perspective, you know, and just, you know, during these situations when they happen,

The one thing you control is your positivity and how you think about the situation and that you're going to get out of it.

Wynne Leon (12:12)

Right. So your daughter's name reminds me of a story that you told about Captain Sully Sullenberger. And really his first, I'm not sure what the right terminology is, his first mate or the...

Anthony Dyer (12:28)

Yeah, I think it's first mate or copilot in that situation.

Wynne Leon (12:31)

Yeah. Can you tell that perspective that you gave about how they both worked together on that flight that they ditched into the Hudson?

Anthony Dyer (12:40)

yeah, yeah. So his name was Jeff Skiles was the copilot. And like I asked a lot of people like, you know, I do the simulators here at Canon now and you know, Hey, do you remember the copilot from the Sully mission? Right. And no, nobody ever knows, you know, and I was like, man, that guy, he executed basically what we call a bold face. Like there's these situations where like seconds you have to memorize these procedures like to heart, right? Like you're doing them in seconds. And, and, he was doing that and he did it three times, you know, flawlessly.

But the aircraft commander, or my understanding of the story, Sully, he basically saw the writing on the wall and was like, okay, we're gonna ditch in the Hudson. It's the safest place to land. And just working together as a crew making the, there's really not a right or wrong answer to a lot of these, right? It's not black and white, but there's a safe and unsafe. And together collectively, they came up with a safe decision and saved lives.

Wynne Leon (13:26)

Right, right. By working together, by knowing those procedures. ~ And you're right. Nobody, we don't, I didn't know his name before I read your book.

Anthony Dyer (13:36)

Yeah, it was an awesome story of just how important a boldface is and to those steps when you can almost robotically do it in your sleep, you know.

Wynne Leon (13:44)

And boldface refers to the procedures that they follow.

Anthony Dyer (13:48)

Yeah, so there's basically like when you get an emergency procedure, there's a technical order of checklist. You're often referencing, right? And so a boldface is something where you don't have time to even look at that. You just, you know it by heart, you know, and there's an open or there's a, get tested on it. You're evaluated, ask you what your boldface and you would, you know, muscle memory, go through the steps like chair flight it. And it's something you put in the memory that, know, it's something crazy. Like I realized that there's some things in life you could be taught once that could save everybody's life, you know, and that's a, aviating really, really showed me that.

Wynne Leon (14:18)

Right? Right. Amazing. Well, you have so many great sayings ~ and inspirational imagery, things like, you know, living a house money life, roots and wings, and that life can make you bitter or better. Is there a particular phrase that resonates with you right now in your face of life right now?

Anthony Dyer (14:42)

Oh yeah, you know, on TikTok the other day and I hope this guy don't mind me using this quote. I don't remember who it was, but he said, God will put you back together in front of those who broke you. And I like to change that sort of to like, God will put you back together in front of what broke you, whatever vice, whatever trauma, you know, at the end of the day, like there's a very spiritual part of my healing. That's the cornerstone of it all, you know? And I tell people the most honest conversation I ever had was with me and God in the mirror that night.

Wynne Leon (15:07)

Say more about the conversation that you had with God in the mirror.

Anthony Dyer (15:11)

Yeah, so I'd had a, you sort of mentioned earlier, a conversation with a preacher before and, know, there's a lot of things going on in my life. was drinking what was a pint on the weekend, turning into a pint at night with sleeping pills and I ended up losing a lung. Like a lot of people, I haven't talked about that a lot, but I lost a lung my last year in the Air Force. And, you know, and I'm bitter, right? I'm feeling sorry for myself and I'm mad at the world, you know, and getting done with two decades of war and all that. And so I asked the preacher and I told him the situation. He's like, well, son, he's like, you know,

why circumstances can make you bitter or better, the choice is yours. And I chose better. And then during that revelation later, I'm having this conversation with mirror and Jesus, and I realized I had turned to everything, the bottle, all these other vices, all these different

things, except for Him And in a way, think sometimes when you meet God halfway, you'll get put in isolation before elevation.

Wynne Leon (16:04)

Hmm put in isolation before elevation so you haven't gone all the way there to your Salvation yet. Is that a good way to put it?

Anthony Dyer (16:18)

Yeah, I would say I'm still climbing, you know, and I still have a lot of questions as far as like the age old question. Why does bad things happen to good people? And you know, I still ask God that and I've been told different things, but I'm still looking for that 100 % right answer for that. You know, I'm sure one day I'll know though.

Wynne Leon (16:34)

Right, right. So to say again, the phrase that you were using, God puts you back together.

Anthony Dyer (16:40)

in front of those who broke you. God will put you back together in front of those who broke you. So it's a very powerful statement that God made. And I like to, you know, again, change that to what thing, what trauma, you know, broke you.

Wynne Leon (16:53)

So tell us

What's your mission now?

Anthony Dyer (16:58)

I love this question. know, the other day I got asked this, they were like, the biggest mission you're on now and who's the copilot who's flying besides you. And I was like, you know, the biggest, biggest mission I'm on now is being the best dad I could be, you know, so the copilot would be my wife and this mission of raising this, beautiful girl, you know, and just, it's cool. You know, I tell people I had a lot of call signs, especially flying. That's a big thing. Right. And mine was, was uncle Tito and I've been called many other things that I can't say on here,

You know, the best one I had been called was when my daughter called me dad. And that's a very, you know, that's my, that's my foundation.

Wynne Leon (17:32)

Right, right. Well, I want to quote to you from your book. ~

But that's the beauty of our journey. The scars and imperfections are not blemishes they're badges of honor. They're marks of our resilience, signs of our growth. They shape us, mold us, and show us how far we've come. Sometimes we land only to take off again.

I'm still a constant work in progress. And in life, just like in aviation, sometimes the exam comes first and then the lesson.

As I sit here writing the final words of this book, I'm reminded of the two words that have defined my life, roots and wings. Roots tether us to our beginnings and the people and places that shape us and the values that give us purpose. Wings, however, are the tools that carry us forward, granting us the ability to rise above adversity, explore the unknown and pursue dreams beyond the horizon. They represent

the balance between our past and future, stability and growth. That's just beautiful. what strikes me about your mission now is that you're the roots for Sullivan's life now.

Anthony Dyer (18:49)

Yeah, you know, I never really looked at it in that angle. That's awesome. Never thought of that. yeah, it's just, you know, her roots, her foundation, her moral compass, you know, starts with me and her mom. it's it's beautiful to see like realizing like good grades is important. All this other stuff is important, right? But to see her care for someone else, you know, is is amazing when you see that happen. I almost want you to cry, you know, and to see her her just heart just big, as bright as it is, you know, and that is, like I said, my new mission as being the best dad I could be.

Wynne Leon (19:18)

That is amazing. Amazing, Thank you. So grateful to you for coming on and talking about your story, your wonderful book, Moon Child your mission, all the wisdom that you've learned from aviating, from healing. just am so impressed.

Anthony Dyer (19:36)

Thank you, I appreciate you for having me on Wynne. It's been a pleasure and honor.

Wynne Leon (19:40)

the honor is mine. Thank you, Anthony.

Anthony Dyer (19:43)

Thank you.

Wynne Leon (19:46)

you

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