

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 40: Andrew Zimmern

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Tim Ferriss:

Mele Kalikimaka is the thing to say on a bright Hawaiian Christmas day...
Oh! I didn't see you there. Hi everybody! This is Tim Ferriss. Welcome to another episode of *The Tim Ferriss Show*. I have the holiday spirit in me, and it's not even anywhere close, but you know what? It's never too early for Christmas music. For all those people out there who disagree...jolly up! Really. Get along with it. In any case...

I have a really fun episode for you guys. At least I had a blast doing it, and I hope you do as well. But first, I do get asked about tea. I said *assed*, as if it's A-S-S-E-D, which I haven't really said before. Might be getting late. Maybe I need some more caffeine. But yes, I was "assed" about my tea preferences, and one of my favorites, which is a little tougher to get but it's fun to look for, is from Taiwan. Or at least it's mailed from Taiwan.

It is from Living Tea, which is a really interesting organization. You can check them out at livingtea.net. It is a 1960s *hui an sheng puerh*. The word *sheng*, by the way, means uncooked or raw or fresh. It is the same character that is the [foreign language] in Japanese. It is also the *sei* of *sensei*. So if you have *sensei* (like *teacher* in Japanese), it literally means born before. So before born is the *sei* of *sheng*, okay?

Coincidentally, there are words in Japanese that use the same characters that you find in Chinese, but they mean very different things. So *sensei* is [foreign language] or *mister*, like Mr. Cheng in Chinese. Pretty funny stuff. The perhaps most amusing example is [foreign language], which in Japanese is *letter*. You write someone a letter, a love letter. That is [foreign language], but that is [foreign language] in Mandarin Chinese, and that is *toilet paper*. Too bad. Lost in translation. What are you gonna do? When you don't have a writing system, and you need to borrow/steal someone else's, well, sometimes those things happen. Anyway, I digress.

The guest for this episode is none other than (you guessed it) Andrew Zimmern. Andrew Zimmern is a fantastic fellow. He's also a world-class chef, television host and producer, food writer, and at the end of the day, an incredible teacher. You've probably seen his show *Bizarre Foods* or *Dining with Death*. In 2010 and 2013, he was awarded the James Beard Foundation Award, which in the culinary/cuisine world is the equivalent of winning the Best Actor Oscar twice in four years. He's an impressive dude.

What a lot of people don't know is that in the earlier chapters of his life, he was at the lowest of the low. At one point, he was sleeping on the streets, stealing purses, and shooting heroin. In our conversation, he shares all of this. We delve into every nook and cranny of his background and his ascension to success, including his culinary tricks, how he developed his hit TV show, his influences, key turning points in his life, and much more. This was a very fun interview to do. Andrew is a pro. He's really good at this type of interview or conversation. He's an enthusiastic guy, and I hope you enjoy it as much as I did. So without further ado, please meet Andrew Zimmern.

Tim Ferriss: Welcome, ladies and gentlemen! This is Tim Ferriss. Welcome to another episode of *The Tim Ferriss Show*. I'm very excited to have Andrew Zimmern with us. Andrew, it is so nice to have you on the phone.

Andrew Zimmern: Thank you very much, Tim. Good to talk to you.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. It's been, I think, a long time coming for me. I remember being interviewed on your podcast, what seems like ages ago, and maybe that's because you sort of acted as my ad hoc therapist while I was experimenting on television, where...

Andrew Zimmern: I don't think with you anyone acts as your ad hoc anything. I mean, there's a beautiful unintentional-intentional rhythm to the things you do. I mean, over the last couple of years, we've become friends, and it's what people do for each other. I like to think I always remain teachable and that's the core of your stuff, that's what I take from it in its broadest possible sense. So I think it's doubly charming that you actually practice what you preach.

Tim Ferriss: Well, I appreciate it. I have to say, I don't think I would have made it through even the preparatory stages with television, let alone the grueling filming schedule and editing schedule had it not been for our sessions. So thank you very much for that. I don't know how you do what you do. That's part of what I want to explore today.

Andrew Zimmern: Sure.

Tim Ferriss: You are the hardest working man in show business, as they might say. I am just astonished by how many projects you have going on, whether that's sort of sequentially or in parallel. Maybe we could start with just a couple a rapid-fire questions. Then I want to dig into some of your background.

Andrew Zimmern: Sure, and let's not assume that the way I'm doing it is actually successful. I mean, the therapy session can work both ways. I often wake up in the

middle of the night and wonder to myself if the number of balls I'm juggling is actually in inverse proportion to my ability to make some of those balls bigger. Visualize that.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, no... I was thinking of that and then the plate spinning. I think both of them are very probative. But you've had some huge successes, and of course there is a lot behind the scenes that people don't see. I guess just to start off, and these are in no particular order, when you were starting to conceive of *Bizarre Foods*, what shows did you look to as inspiration or from which you wanted to pull elements? What were the models you had in mind, if any? What were you looking to draw from?

Andrew Zimmern: Oh no, no, no... I definitely did. You know, I grew up watching *Great Chefs of Europe* on PBS. It was the first *Great Chef* series. I loved the intensity of that and the attention to detail and the focus on the food. I morphed a little bit into, at one point in my TV watching as I was sort of looking at things that I wanted to pay attention to, sort of the smartness of what Michael Palin was doing.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah. Mm-hmm.

Andrew Zimmern: You know, I'm from New York, so when someone says, "What do you like?" I answer that by saying, "Well, I'll tell you what I don't like." And what I didn't like was the sort of old-school, late 80s, Rick Steves, Celtic canned music, watching him walk across the cliffs of Dover getting bigger and bigger and bigger in the frame, and then breathing, sighing, and looking out over the ocean, and then saying something to the effect of, "A lovely day's walk; and now...on to the village!"

It just seemed to me that I wanted the smartness of Michael Palin. I wanted the attention to detail of some of those early food shows like *Great Chefs*, and I wanted to make sure that whatever I was doing was within my unique ability to deliver. Obviously Rick Steves is an expert on travel and has been everywhere. He's a legend in the business and pioneered. And without folks like him, folks like me don't have a job. There's probably not even a Travel Channel, actually.

But at the end of the day, I thought that anybody could've stood there and said what he said. You know, you could've paid an actor to deliver those lines and nobody would've been the wiser. I wanted to do things that were more what we now call *docu-follow*. I put all of those sort of things together.

There was a bit of a Trojan horse involved in my show pitching. I wanted to make a show that allowed me a platform to talk about patience, tolerance, and understanding in the world. I wanted to change the tone of

our national conversation away from the things that we *don't* have in common toward the things that we *do* have in common. I wanted to make a show that railed against the vile human frailty of contempt prior to investigation.

So if you go and pitch that and then sort of launch into this travel-food idea, everyone shows you the door. So I basically tried to sell a food-culture show with the hook: stories from the fringe. It ended up being called *Bizarre*. The original title for it was *Chew on This*, but Eric Schlosser, in one of the children's version of one of his books, was called that.

I very much snuck a show in the door knowing that if it was successful, I would get leverage. I would be able to sort of morph the show into what it sort of is today. It has taken me 200 shows and 8-9 seasons, but I think the last couple of years we have really done a fantastic job of representing cultural storytelling through food in the right way.

Tim Ferriss: I'm looking at some notes I took down after one of our first therapy sessions in my direction, and I found a lot of it so helpful. One of the recommendations was (I'm paraphrasing, of course) that the most important thing is to be you, not your inner actor. Be yourself and keep it within your area of expertise. The line that really stuck with me was how episode 1 is how you're going to have to be, so...

Andrew Zimmern: Episode 1, moment 1. You can never take that back. There were a whole bunch of things involved in there, and to tell people sort of the larger part of the story and have it make sense to them was that after a gazillion successes in many different areas, you know, you had the opportunity to expand your brand in major cable. It's a whole different skill set. It's a whole different set of muscles. You and I have talked many times, sometimes late at night from continents far, far away, about how to approach this kind of work and help to make it successful.

I think I told you the story of episode 1, show 1. It actually was the pilot. I went to the Asadachi, which is a restaurant in Tokyo that the translation for the name means morning erections. True. It's a getemono bar. The kind of place where businessmen close deals and drink a lot. They are tiny little izakaya where the food is very, very strange and is meant to, "If you eat snake bile, I'll eat snake bile," and then the deal will be done sort of thing. It's a place where guys get drunk and eat crazy food and then go off whoring for the rest of the day and have their #2 sign the contract.

So we go to this place, and the very first thing they had me do was a standup outside the building and then walk in the door. There was a part of me that had all the funniest lines about making fun of their name.

Tim Ferriss: What do you mean by standup?

Andrew Zimmern: The little walk-and-talk. The camera catches me walking down the street. This is very 1999 TV. The camera is walking down the street. The talent stops, looks towards the camera, delivers a couple of lines to set up with the audience is going to see, and then walks in the door. The camera stays on the door. The door swings shut behind them, and the camera tilts up and catches the name of the establishment.

Tim Ferriss: Got it.

Andrew Zimmern: Right?

Tim Ferriss: Yep.

Andrew Zimmern: We no longer make our show that way, but that's the way everyone did it in 1999-2000, when we were contemplating the pilot and then ended up shooting it right before September 11. It was the first pilot.

Tim Ferriss: Sorry to interrupt. So you were thinking of all these lines to deliver related to the name of the place.

Andrew Zimmern: Yeah. You know, you can make fun of these people. It's the easy go-to. You see people do it all the time on TV. A little voice inside my head said, "Don't do it, because if you do that, you're going to have to come up with those lines all the time. You're going to be someone you're not. All you wanted to do your whole life was..." And quite frankly, the person that I am is very respectful of other cultures. "Don't do it. Don't give into the fast, easy, cheap temptation," which we always do. It's the easiest way.

Tim Ferriss: The cheap applause.

Andrew Zimmern: Yeah. All I did was I sort of walked up and turned and said some benign line and walked in the door. The moral of the story being that I didn't have to make fun of the people, make fun of their food, make fun of the name. And it has turned out to be the best decision I ever made because not only does the show stand (and my brands) for... You know, people always talk about the respect that I pay to other people within the show, which pleases me, and I think it's an important thing for all of us when we are travelers, but it is so much less work just to be yourself. You don't have to change that.

There are lots of people who have hosted shows on Travel Channel, Food Network, etc., who are not experts in their field. They do a soul-food cooking show, but if you ask them what johnnycakes are, they couldn't tell

you...unless they did script and the researchers had filled them in the day before. It's a very, very strange world on television. Some people are just presenters. You, on the other hand, me, Tony, Alton Brown... There are a handful of people out there. These are folks who have been doing their content for years before the TV camera came on. We just get to be ourselves.

Tim Ferriss: One of the aspects of your work that I've always appreciated is how genuinely interested you seem because you *are* genuinely interested.

Andrew Zimmern: Yeah. That's me.

Tim Ferriss: Just as a side note... I have a buddy who runs a bunch of restaurants and a few of his companies do a lot of catering. At one point, they had one of the most famous Italian chef personalities on TV hosting an event. They called this chef's assistant and asked for her meatball recipe. They said, "What meatball recipe?" It was such an eye-opening, sort of jaw-dropping experience for this guy. So yes, certainly, what you see is not always what you get.

On the cooking side of things, just to throw in some randomness to this, if you had to choose (I was going to say for the rest of your life) for the next year, three herbs or spices to cook with, to experiment with (and you can modify the question), what would you choose?

Andrew Zimmern: I can't exist without hot chilies, shallots, and citrus...lemon. I'll pick lemon.

Tim Ferriss: Citrus lemon. Hmm...

Andrew Zimmern: You know, the world of herbs and spices is great, but before that, there are some other building blocks that I would prefer to have in my kitchen or my desert island. I'm going to assume on my island that you've stranded me on that I have access to, that I can walk down to the ocean and grab some seaweed or fish or throw rocks at birds, and get something over a fire. So the first three things I would want to have with me are hot chilies, shallots or some kind of onion (I happen to prefer shallots of all the Allium), and citrus (I generically choose lemon above the others). With those things, I can do everything.

Sure, I can pick cumin or cilantro or basil or things like that, but they have fairly limited use. With the lemon, chilies, and an Allium or shallot, I can do anything. I can do ceaseless variations on them. The variety of flavor combinations and techniques that I can use with those give me the most variety so I wouldn't be so bored. Maybe I am overthinking the question, but that's my gut instinct to go with those.

Tim Ferriss: No, you're not overthinking it at all. I love asking this question because I still consider myself a novice cook, certainly, but in doing research for the *4-Hour Chef*, the citrus really blew my mind. I think I either read or had someone say to me, "I use citrus the way a lot of people use salt." I was like, "Huh. That's a really interesting way to think about it."

Andrew Zimmern: Absolutely. Well, salt is an acid and citrus is an acid, and there is an incredible amount of acid in all the Alliums. There is an incredible amount of acid in all of the chilies. It's no secret as to why those things are food-changing, food-altering, technique- inspiring ingredients to use. Much more versatile in the kitchen than basil or thyme or something like that.

When I talk to young cooks about balancing a dish, its texture contrast, its temperature contrast, and the way you build flavor contrast and create a more symphonic taste experience is by experimenting with acids and fats, so by its very nature, chilies and shallots and lemons and salt and sugar are the kinds of things we use in different forms, but they are very acidic and they provide much more flavor when we're cooking than most people give them credit for.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, definitely. These are such simple things, but game changers for me as someone who sort of viewed cooking through the lens of a microwave and that was about it for many, many years. Just the ability to take something like chilies... A friend of mine gave me some Thai chilies that she was growing in her garden and just sort of sautéing them in cooking oil for a few minutes before using that oil for something else totally changes the dish. It's really so much fun to...

Andrew Zimmern: It's so funny you used that example. I was about to talk about lemon juice the same way. Sometimes with my wife's roast chicken... She stuffs her cavity with lemon and herbs and garlic, and that lemon roasts and it starts to break down, and it boils and perfumes the inside of that dish. Some of that lemon juice goes down onto the bottom of the pan and caramelizes and gives a tartness and a wonderful bitterness to the olive-oil-based pan sauce that she makes for that dish. It seasons the roast vegetables that she puts in them.

But then when it comes to the table, that lemon flavor, because heat has been applied to it and sort of kicks down the impact of the citrus, she then will finish the dish with a little bit of fresh citrus and olive oil. We do that a lot in our family. You then have two or three or four (depending on what bite you take) different variations on that same ingredient lemon in that dish. It creates a layered experience, which is much more sensual and a deeper flavor. It's more fully realized.

That's the difference between the kind of roast chicken that... You know, everyone says, "Why is Jonathan Waxman's chicken at Barbuto so frickin' awesome? It's because even though it just looks like roast chicken with a little bit of sea salt and salsa verde drizzled over some of the pieces, there is so much difference seasoning at different times in that dish that you are taking in a much broader symphonic taste experience than the looks of the dish would tell you exist. It's profound. I think that's the beauty of food. It's like art.

I remember sitting in my Northern European painting class as a freshman at Vassar College, trying to focus on the first day of school instead of the girl's backside sitting in the desk in front of me. The professor put a picture up on the wall. It was some 16th-century Northern European portrait painter. It was a woman standing at a window. There was a table in front of her with a bowl of fruit. It was a sunny day outside through the window. She said, "Everyone write down what you see and know about this painting."

Everyone wrote down the same 10 things that were in there. There was a dog. She was wearing a blue dress. There was a bowl of fruit on the table. Then my professor spent the next 45 minutes detailing what Flemish life was like in the late 16th century based only on what she saw in the painting, because, you know, there was a banana in the bowl of fruit and a pineapple, but those don't grow in Holland so these people were wealthy. They were traders.

There was symbolism, but there were also... She approached it like Sherlock Holmes. I learned that day, because I was also cooking a lot at the time... It reminded me of what a lot of chefs were saying and what my dad would tell me when I was eight years old in a little sleepy brasserie in Les Halles in Paris picking *bigorneau* with a big silver metal toothpick.

I began to realize I could tell stories about life through food. I now describe it as being able to talk and tell about the history of a people and a culture by staring into a bowl of soup. But it really is the same thing. You can deduce so much about food and in its preparation and in talking it through with people about where concerns are.

Just the way we are sort of geekishly talking about lemon, I think it underlines and underscores the fact that today in America we fetishize food in a way that is greater and deeper and probably has a lot of negative impact as well as positive, but we fetishize it in a way that has never been done before in the history of the world about any sort of cultural meme. I can't think of a one.

Tim Ferriss: No, I agree. I want to explore that a bit, but before we do... shallots. All right. So I am a big fan of shallots. I've met quite a few chefs who are also big fans of shallots. Is it possible for a novice chef to use shallots well without having very good knife skills?

Andrew Zimmern: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: It is? Okay. I would love for you to elaborate because that always has been for me, and I consider my knife skills pretty decent, but it has still been challenging for me.

Andrew Zimmern: How so? In a recipe that requires them to be minced or sliced thin?

Tim Ferriss: Exactly, which most of the recipes I've come across seem to require that, so I would love for you to... I can do it, but it's not my favorite prep work to do.

Andrew Zimmern: Well, there are two issues at hand. One is how you use a shallot and what's required of it, despite what a certain recipe will tell you. The other one is your knife skills in particular.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Andrew Zimmern: You are no different than any other person who loves to cook and wants to get better. If you loved golf and you were playing golf all the time and you told your friends, "My putting just isn't great," they would look at you and say, "How do you do on the putting green?" And you'd say, "I don't go to the putting green." They would laugh at you.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Andrew Zimmern: I always tell people when they're cooking if you love to cook, buy big bags of carrots, onions, and celery, and every day, mince them, cut them into batons, dice them (when you're sitting around listening to the radio for 10 minutes) and practice your knife skills. If you do that for two weeks, you will improve the amount time... And gosh don't I know how you love saving time...

Tim Ferriss: I do.

Andrew Zimmern: That investment in yourself, a front-side investment in time, a lifetime of time saving. My wife always marvels. She says, "It takes you half the time to make a recipe." I've been cooking a lot longer than she has, but the more she practices knife skills, the faster it becomes for her because that's the sort of mundane... Stop simmering a pot, watching it. You can do other things. You can multitask. I think at the end of the day, it's

assembling your ingredients and your [inaudible], so some of that is knife skills and some of that is how you organize your kitchen. There are a lot of things that you can do to speed things up, but practice is something that helps.

The second thing might be equipment. I'm just going to assume with as many food geek friends as you have that you have the right knife for yourself. But I use a short chef's knife. It's usually about eight inches as my handy sort of go-to knife. I use a thin-bladed one so I can use the front of it choking up to cut small things and I can rock it and chop it using the back three quarters of it if need be. I can even choke up and *tourne* a mushroom if I need to. But I can do almost everything with that one knife.

Then the third issue for this really becomes the mythology of food and why we believe certain people when they tell us we have to do a certain thing. To a large degree, you do a lot of myth busting and you find out in reading all your stuff that there's always something that is perceived to be a truth that it turns out once you investigate it and talk about it with other experts, it turns out you don't need to go from A to B to C to D to get to point E. Sometimes you do. Oftentimes you can just go A to B, and if you do B really well or do B differently, you don't need C and D at all. You arrive at E.

I don't think there's anything wrong with people using a Benriner or a mandolin, some of those vegetable slicers, where you put the blade on it thin setting, and you can shave that shallot into tiny little pieces. There's nothing wrong with using that. Stack up those slices and then rock your knife across it a couple of times, and you will have a micro dice that would rival anything that Masaharu Morimoto can create.

My wife reads recipes, and I'll see her doing something. I'll say, "Why are you cutting the shallot that way? Why are you cutting the carrot that way?" She'll say, "Oh, it says so." And I read the recipe, and I'm like, "Well, there's no need. You can just peel them and leave them whole in the oven. If you slice them into little coins, they're just going to disappear in the pan."

You know, a lot of recipes, except from the very small handful of culinarians, are not as exacting as they should be, and when they are exacting, they're giving you unnecessary information that I think creates a lot of unnecessary busywork.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, definitely. One thing that blew me away (this just blew my mind) is how poorly most recipes perform when you have half a dozen people recipe testing them.

Andrew Zimmern: Oh, yes.

Tim Ferriss: I could not believe and how poorly almost every recipe performed. Because I had for the *4-Hour Chef*, people at high altitude/low humidity in Aspen versus people in Georgia or Florida because I wanted to see how that would affect things, and you would find out that in many cases, somebody would go to a famous restaurant, a writer (certainly not faulting them for that), take a recipe that is designed for 200 covers, massive quantities of food, and then simply use division to take it down to a serving for two or four people. Man, a lot of it just didn't make any sense at all. It's nice to hear you say that.

Also, as a piece of trivia, I'm not sure if the brand talks about it, but the *Benriner* (the Bendy) means convenient in Japanese. That's why it's called that. It's a hell of a device, but you have to watch your fingers.

Andrew Zimmern: Well, you do, but you also learn to leave the tails on your shallot and hold onto that, and then at the very end... You're not handling rock cocaine. I mean, you know, it's a shallot. That last little quarter-inch, just throw it away.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Andrew Zimmern: It's amazing to me that a lot of people (not Martha Stewart) knock magazine recipes whether it's Rachael Ray's or even *Food and Wine*, the magazine I write for. The biggest folks in the business usually write the most exacting recipes because their audience is very quick to turn on them if things don't work out.

When I look at recipes and suggest them for my wife... She'll say, "Oh, it's a great recipe for pound cake." We go on the Internet, and there are 20 recipes for pound cake. I go with the one that even describes to a quarter of an inch the size of the pan. Because if someone is describing that level of detail, you know they have gone through it. The person who writes a recipe that says, "Grease the cake pan," you know, they haven't made it. It's a tip off right away that something is wrong.

Tim Ferriss: Definitely. It reminds me a lot of the David Lee Roth anecdote about the brown M&Ms. He wanted to have all the brown M&Ms removed from the M&Ms that would be in the trailer waiting for him, because (I mean, he's a crazy person, but aside from that) it was anecdotally to ensure that the people managing the tour would read that level of detail in the contract, and if they didn't catch that, there would be other more substantial things (equipment related, setup related) that they would also miss, and therefore, that was the litmus test to see if they would catch that type of detail. I

agree with you. Like, "Get a medium-sized sauce pan." What does that mean to a novice?

Andrew Zimmern: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: To shift gears just a little bit, you went to a great school (Vassar). You traveled, it sounds like, as a child or a young man, to Paris.

Andrew Zimmern: Yeah, my dad was in the international advertising business, so when I was six years old, I started going to Europe three or four times a year, mostly with him. Sometimes just for three or four days at a time. I am a paler version of him. He loves to eat and travel and drink and told stories in the day when you needed to command a dining room table with great storytelling if you were that kind of person who took up space the way my dad did. I mean, he was a great taker-upper of space wherever he was. You knew he was there.

Tim Ferriss: I think it might paint a picture for people who aren't familiar with all of your background that you had a hockey-stick like career, very few bumps in the road from start to finish, just this straight ascension to the TV star that you are today. But one thing that I noticed, and I'm embarrassed I didn't know this earlier, is it seems like you were homeless for a period of time. I was hoping that you could comment...

Andrew Zimmern: Oh, I was a f***ing mess. You know, I grew up in a very idyllic surrounding. I had every opportunity and every advantage that a kid could have. I grew up in New York in the 60s. My dad ran a big ad agency. It was a privileged lifestyle. We had more than one home. We had more than one car. I went to a hoity-toity private school. I went to two months of summer camp in Maine.

But at the same time, my parents divorced. My dad and mom separated; there was a lot of curiosity as to why because there wasn't any fighting our house. It wasn't anything unusual. My dad was coming to grips with his own sexuality and sexual preferences, and thank God, he was true to himself and found love with my stepfather, and they were together as partners for 46 years and married for the last year in the state of Maine where they finally passed the Marriage Equality Act.

But it was a big struggle, and it was really impactful for a six-year-old in 1967. It was a different world than it is today. My mom had an operation in a hospital to get an appendix scar removed in '74 when the bikini lines went down. They gave her the wrong anesthesia in surgery. She was in a coma for a year, hospitals for three or four years. She was never the same when she got out of them.

I was sort of raised in an empty house by a bunch of handlers who made sure I got to school in the morning. I saw my dad on weekends and my step dad; they were together by that point. I was sort of the ultimate latchkey kid. I didn't have a lot of direction, and I was really pretty miserable and didn't know it.

I found drugs and alcohol at a very young age (13), and the moment I got high for the first time, I felt like a raindrop entering the river. I felt like I had just unlocked the mystery to life. The first time in my limited number of years on the planet, I felt comfortable in my own skin. I had a really horrible disease called *more*, so by the time I got to college, I was a daily heroin addict.

In my first week of college, I was hospitalized with alcohol poisoning and arrested for narcotics possession. The school that I was at did an intake on me. They paid for a chemical dependency evaluation. I registered chronic on the Jellinek scale. The counselor told me at that time, "You're going to die. Addicts and alcoholics of your variety wind up in jails, institutions, or dead. You've already done jail time." Which I had. "You've already been institutionalized." Which at that point I had. "So there's really nowhere else for you to go."

You tell that to an 18-year-old kid, and they just laugh at you. I laughed at him. I didn't sober up until I was 31, and things got progressively worse. Alcoholism and drug addiction is a progressive illness. It got worse every single day of my life from that point forward. And I went from a place where in that meeting, I told the guy, "No, I don't have a problem," to when I finally had my last intervention that started the sobriety almost 23 years ago, I just told them I didn't care.

That was a horrible spot. Those last three or four years of my using, I was in that I-don't-care spot. I wanted to die. I lost my apartment. The sheriff of New York evicted me. I was sleeping in an abandoned building on a pile of old clothes that I tossed a bottle of Comet cleanser around every night before I went to bed to keep the rats and roaches off of me when I passed out.

I stole purses on streets. I was a mess. It's really sad. Most people just see the face of the addiction as that person. You know, I was living in an abandoned building. I didn't shower for a year. I was disgusting. I took meals in shelters. I got clothes at the Salvation Army. I mean, I was a garden-variety street person in New York, the type that you cross the block to avoid. I wasn't pushing a shopping cart, but I was filthy and stank and was wearing rags.

Ultimately, I went into a hotel to try to drink myself to death. It didn't work. I had a moment of clarity for the first time in a 15-year period and called a friend and asked for help. Two days later, I tried to talk him out of that help, of course, once he gave it to me, like any alcoholic. I asked for someone to throw me a life preserver, and then I tossed it back at him because I didn't like the color orange. I immediately was sent to a beautiful Center City, Minnesota to a treatment center called Hazelden, which is how I ended up in Minnesota.

Tim Ferriss: I was wondering.

Andrew Zimmern: I was a born-and-bred New Yorker. You know, I had a couple of friends who had come through... Why am I lying to you? Half of my high school went through Hazelden. We all went right from Studio 54 together to treatment together. My friends told me, "You have nothing to go home for. You've never been able to make your life really work."

I had been successful in the restaurant business in New York, and I had done a lot in a career because I was talented. You know, I was the guy who could put out 500 plates of poached eggs at brunch in a busy Central Park West restaurant. I could stand there and sling it on the line in a three-star Michelin restaurant in New York. In those days, they did not have a Michelin Guide there, but you get the drift. I worked in those kinds of places with those kinds of chefs.

It was that skill set that kept me employed, but ultimately, my alcoholism and drug addiction stuck me in Minnesota. So I kept thinking I would go back. I worked for year and a half for Thomas Keller at Rakel, and I'd worked for Anne Rosenzweig at Arcadia and great chefs in New York City, many of whom fired me after a day of working because they caught onto my s***. A lot of them didn't.

But I wanted to come back to New York and give it another try, but my friends said, "Don't do it. Stay in Minnesota. Do something different." So I started here and ended up opening up a restaurant that became very successful. I left that. I got into the media business because I felt like there was an opportunity there that if I didn't seize it, the door would kind of shut forever on that kind of opportunity, just because I saw the popularity of food and media in that intersection, and I wanted to be a part of it early on.

Tim Ferriss: How old were you at that point?

Andrew Zimmern: Oh gosh... 14 years ago I stopped. I was in the restaurant business here in Minneapolis the first seven years that I lived here. Then I spent a couple of years consulting, and at that time I was working for free for a local radio

station doing a food show, a TV station where I was a morning chef on one of those wacky local morning shows. It was the best job I ever had.

I learned how to read, write, and think critically when it came to doing television. I learned how to edit. I learned what a cameraman had to do. I learned how to produce a segment. I learned how to behave on camera and not be self-conscious. It was the best training I ever had for the job that I do now.

I worked at a magazine doing restaurant writing and essay writing about food. I did five or six little blurbs and columns as part of a three-person dining section staff for our local glossy monthly here in Minneapolis St. Paul magazine. I had a great editor who taught me how to write again. I was the luckiest guy in the whole world.

Tim Ferriss: That is an incredible story, and it gives me a lot to think on. One of the questions that immediately jumped to mind for me was if you had the opportunity to interact with someone who was exactly where you were at age 18 or 20, is there a way to persuade that person to avoid that descent into despair and destitution? Because...

Andrew Zimmern: You know the answer to that question is no.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, well, that's why I'm asking.

Andrew Zimmern: No, no. I have that opportunity all the time. I mean, I am very active in a 12-step group, and I believe in carrying forward the message that was carried to me that there is another way of living, that there is a solution to the problems that alcoholics and addicts have.

The question that you pose is that alcohol and drug addiction has a major component. In fact, the defining component of those diseases (and it is a disease, despite what Gene Simmons say, is that it sends your brain a message that tells you you do not have a disease. You know, if someone tells you you have cancer and there's a chance you're going to die from it unless you do something, not only do people jump to help you, but you jump to help yourself.

Yes, there is a handful... I have had friends/parents who have gotten bad news at the end of their life and said, "You know something, I'm not going to pursue wellness. I've had two hip replacements. I'm done. I'm 90 years old. Let's pursue a different way." But for the most part, people seek help.

With alcoholism and drug addiction, the first time somebody tells you, "Hey dude, you've got a problem," you can't stop. It's a compulsion. It's an

allergy. It is defined by its strange mental blind spots that tell you you don't have a problem. That's the tough thing.

I wish all it took was a good conversation and then nodding realization, but I can't tell you how many people sat at the end of my bed, metaphorically speaking, told me what my problem was, told me there was a solution, you know, "Be abstinent. Go to meetings. Get help. Do the opposite of the things your brain is telling you." Every version of that conversation, I nodded my head every time and said, "Absolutely. I'm going to do that." Then I could do it for a day, two days, three days, and then I would be right back out there. Sometimes I would be right back out there five minutes later.

I got arrested once, and the judge was giving me a big lecture, and I looked up at the judge, and I said "F*** you, your honor," and I started screaming at him. The reason was I didn't want to hear what he was saying. But the real reason I was doing it was I knew he was going to slam his gavel and throw me back inside of the county jail, which was on the other side of the courthouse, and inside that county jail were people with dope and booze and all the things I wanted to get away from me, to quiet the voice in my head and to not be feeling what I was feeling.

That is sad and tawdry, but it's the truth. I just wanted to get high more than I wanted to sit there and listen to his lecture. No one can tell someone they should quit, which is the horror of the disease. Life, however, has a way of humbling you. For me, at a certain point... My parents thought I was dead. I had lost every job. I was physically ill and disgusting. You can list all the things. I couldn't hold a job. I couldn't do anything. I couldn't function. I was dying, and I wanted to die.

At the end of the day, for the first time ever in my life, I put the cork in the bottle because the last people that in my heart I loved and wanted to respect me walked out the door. At the end of the day, it was their tough love and realizing I had no more relationships and that I had *really* lost everything that got me to maybe take someone's advice.

And I did it for like 10 minutes. That's all it took. But the very next person I spoke to said something to me that essentially said, "You don't know the answer to everything. You can walk up the door and get hit via bus, or you could by the winning lottery ticket. You don't know. You don't know what life has to offer." For some reason, that made sense to me at that point and got me one more day. Then one more day and one more day. And now I have been sober for 23 years.

Tim Ferriss:

Well this is something I would love to explore more. I know you have some time constraints today, but we'll have to do a part two at some point.

Andrew Zimmern: I would love that.

Tim Ferriss: I hope, at the very least, and I'll ask one or two very fast closing questions, that people listening to this realize there might be light at the end of the tunnel. I've talked about some of my dark moments before, but I have had some extended periods of some pretty terrifying darkness and thoughts not very different from those that you've had. It's easy to believe that that's all there's going to be indefinitely. So hopefully...

Andrew Zimmern: The truth of the matter is I paint a horrible and disturbing picture of it where there is no help, and nothing can convince the alcoholic or the drug addict that there is another way except that millions of people have gotten sober and solved that problem. No one is terminally unique, so while all the things I said are true, it's also true that there is a solution. Part of that begins by picking up the phone and taking advice from someone else.

To bring it around, and I'm not trying to minimize the impact of these things, remaining teachable, as I said at the top of our conversation, to me, is one of the great things to achieve in life. So when you pick up the phone and very humbly said... By the way, if someone is brilliant and everyone puts on a pedestal as being one of the great, noble thinkers of our time and people intersect with your books and your other materials have a profound respect for you, and rightfully so, but you're still humble enough to pick up the phone and call, at the time, an acquaintance, and say, "I'm having a problem with this thing, and I think you've done this before. What advice would you give me?" That's how we started our friendship.

For people out there who are struggling or have a family member who is struggling, there is a solution. You know, on our website andrewzimmern.com, we have some links to different treatment centers to AA's general service number. You can call a local hospital. You can stop a policeman in the street and say, "Help me."

It is a world built out there for us to get out of ourselves and raise the white flag. That's the very, very first step. It's saying, "I give up. I have a problem. I need to talk to someone about it." It doesn't mean you need to get sober that day either, but you do have to start to think about the problem you have and about who to talk to about it.

Tim Ferriss: Andrew, you are a mensch. I appreciate the kind words, obviously. I think it's extremely important advice, and I'm glad that we opened up the backstory. I had no idea. I know you have to run. I always appreciate your time.

Andrew Zimmern: No problem. You should email Jen, and let's try to do a part two in the short future so you can air them back to back or do something with it. Whatever you want to do.

Tim Ferriss: I would love to do that. For those people listening to this interview, part one, where should I find more about you? Where can they learn more about you?

Andrew Zimmern: Everything is on andrewzimmern.com.

Tim Ferriss: Perfect.

Andrew Zimmern: It's a really fun website too.

Tim Ferriss: It is.

Andrew Zimmern: Lots of great information. Great interviews with people. You know, you can scroll back and listen to us having a conversation about you.

Tim Ferriss: Back in the day. All the good things. Well, Andrew, I really enjoyed this. I think a lot of people will benefit from it, so until next time, thank you very, very much. I really appreciate it.

Andrew Zimmern: Take it easy, brother.

Tim Ferriss: All right, man. Thank you.