

Fear Me Out Podcast

Episode 4

Hosted by Clinical Psychologist - Dana P. Saperstein PhD.

Guest Speaker

Kami Craig - Overcoming Adversity

Dr. Dana 00:11

There are two basic motivating forces: fear and love. When we're afraid, we pull back from life. When we're in love, we open up to all that life has to offer with passion, excitement, and acceptance.

Fear Me Out 00:30

Coming to you from our studio in Santa Barbara, California. This is the fear me out podcast. We're not your typical Self Help Program. Our show takes a deep dive into those psychological issues that affect us on a daily basis. We hope to shift your perspective and have you experiencing emotions differently. Now here are your hosts Kim Fauskee and Dr. Dana Saperstein.

Kim Fauskee 00:52

As we continue our series on the importance of living an examined life, our interior guest today reached the pinnacle of sport before age 30 By winning an NCAA championship, three Olympic medals, which include two gold and a silver, numerous individual accolades, and is regarded as arguably the best woman to ever play your sport. However, this success has an easily translated into the rest of her life, including her transition away from sport. So please join us as we speak with CAMI Craig and find out more about the woman behind the metals. So CAMI welcome all the way from Salt Lake City back to your hometown.

Kami Craig 01:29

Thank you, it feels really good to be here.

Kim Fauskee 01:33

I was just kind of looking at your athletic resume and your athletic accolades. And for those that don't know you or don't know of you. You're an NCAA national champion. From your days at USC. You're the only two time Cuttino award winner that is awarded to the top collegiate water polo player. And I'm assuming that is just like the Heisman trophy of football.

Kami Craig 01:57

Yep, that's right.

Kim Fauskee 01:58

You're a three time world champion. You're in a Pan American Games champion. You're a three time Olympian. That's two gold medals and one silver medal. And I think Dana is a bit disappointed that

you're not wearing those today. But if we have you back for a future episode, maybe you can bring those and show them off to Dana. And what we just found out and congratulations to you, you're going to be inducted into the USA Water Polo Hall of Fame in in just a couple of weeks. Yes. So that is quite an honor.

Kami Craig 02:31

Now it's been it's been a phenomenal ride and an exciting life and a fun one.

Kim Fauskee 02:37

So we're not going to focus on on your athletic career. But it'd be interesting to hear from you. Who was CAMI Craig, the athlete?

Kami Craig 02:47

Yeah. When I hear that, I think about just kind of how I was introduced into athletics. I'm the only athlete in my family. And it really, my connection to movement and athletics was born out of being diagnosed with ADHD, and, and dyslexia. And the doctors prescribing me with Ritalin and my mom choosing to open the bottle and pour it down the sink and decide that she was going to design my life in a way that helped manage my energy rather than allowing prescriptions to do that. Now prescriptions can be great for others, that wasn't the choice that we decided. But that is when it was kind of a full lean into, okay, how are we going to manage this energy? We're going to do it through movement, and we're going to do it through sport.

Kim Fauskee 03:46

But how did your mom become so bold to actually take that approach with you?

Kami Craig 03:51

I think, you know, I would love for her to answer that question. And the way that she shares it with me is she describes standing there and thinking I'm going to give my daughter medication and then I'm going to send her off to school without knowing the effects of it. And as she sat there and kind of processed you know, really what the effects could be and how it could potentially change me. She shares that she just looked at me and thought I don't want to change you. I don't want to know, I want to find a way to manage this outside of taking medication. How old were you at this time? I was three or four years old.

Dr. Dana 04:40

Oh, wow. Yeah, very young.

Kami Craig 04:42

Yep. Yeah. Three, four years old. And the neighbor knew that I was a handful. And he had a pool in his backyard and he would say, you know, Dale come up to the house and let the kids go swimming. And that was really where my love of water was born, my love of movement was born. It was a place where I could be loud, I could be energetic, I could be explosive, I could be strong, I could be all of those things. And in true fashion, I tried every sport I did volleyball, softball, basketball, swimming, and then eventually was introduced to my love of water polo. I always say I retired with a really great relationship with water polo, a great relationship with my experience and my teammates and coaches. Now, does

that mean it was perfect? Absolutely not. But I have, you know, a really good relationship with that experience. And so, who is Kami the athlete? I think it was really born out of a need and necessity for energy management. And, again, it was a place where I could feel whole and most like myself, were areas like school, I felt, you know, boxed in, I felt like, you know, I had to be quiet, I had to behave a certain way. And sports, you could just be all out.

Kim Fauskee 06:18

What, what probably is your biggest takeaway from being an athlete?

Kami Craig 06:25

Yeah, I think you know, it's interesting to start athletics at such a young age. Like everything kind of has blend together, like a part of who I was, and my identity was an athlete. And that showed up in a lot of different ways in my life outside of a playing field or practice, right. My greatest takeaway, I think, you know, I grew up with these learning differences, right. And I think those really built the resilience and the intuition, the work ethic, the creativity, and the resilient courage, like that was built in the classroom and having to learn, figure out and overcome the challenges of having learning differences of ADHD and dyslexia. And it's amazing how much that contributed to my athletic career, and how I could apply those same things that I had to learn in the classroom easily to how I showed up as an athlete. You know, being an athlete, it takes resilience, work ethic, you know, all the things that I just named intuition, creativity, courage, all of those things. And I would say that in who I am really kind of overlapped. If I'm thinking strictly about what I take away from being an athlete is just like a handful of incredible friends and teammates, the ability and opportunity to travel the world and see outside of just where I came from. Education at the University of Southern California, the repetition and learning people understanding people, how do you bring teams together? A wealth of knowledge, experience and connection.

Kim Fauskee 08:32

Usually, people with learning disabilities don't have high levels of confidence, you became an elite athlete, which takes a tremendous amount of self confidence to achieve what you achieved. How did you get there?

Kami Craig 08:50

I think that again, it was like, almost when I got to the pool, I was walking through a threshold. Like, that was my zone. You know, that's where I felt most comfortable in the water. And again, it's it's so interesting, I was reflecting on this recently, is, you know, I'm a swimmer, I'm a water polo player. And I was constantly in a bathing suit. So you know, even like, we think about young women growing up and like body confidence and you're talking about emotional confidence and just self confidence in general. But, you know, I've never thought about my body as an athlete. It always had a purpose. It was used as you know, a certain it had a meaning and a purpose. It was not about how it looked or how it portrayed to others as long as it was in the water doing what it needed to do. I was happy and I think I was so like, welcomed and received as who I felt I was at at the pool and on the playing field that there was a certain confidence that I got to meet at the pool versus like I didn't have To bring it. It was there waiting for me. And I think, you know, growing up with learning disabilities and differences is like, It's brutal. Like, I still feel uncomfortable or vulnerable, or the doubt sneak in and I have to pump myself up, right?

You know, that's, that's a wound of just not feeling enough or smart enough or good enough, right. And that's been a challenge. But I think, you know, the acceptance of who I was, and my strength and my outgoingness, and my loudness, and all of that was really accepted in the pool and never felt like a place that I couldn't just show up wholly.

Kim Fauskee 10:42

So none of those followed you. We were talking about that kind of lack of confidence there. None of those followed you into sport at all.

Kami Craig 10:52

Sure, I mean, sure, doubt, fear nerves, all of that shows up in sport, and followed me in different ways. And even like, the the just kind of discomfort and having to share with a coach or a teammate, like, hey, I need you to use a whiteboard, or like, you know, can you tell me like, What post this is? Because I'm all flipped backwards. I'm dyslexic, you know. And so, really right away. I mean, when I talk about, like, my learning differences, creating intuition, like I could feel who was going to be helpful, and I could call in help like nobody's business, I didn't care about asking for help. I was like, yes, please help me. And so I would find, you know, the teammate that knew all of the plays like the back of her hand, and I would say, okay, like, I know, the play, you can trust me, you can count on me. But there's going to be a moment in the game where, like, I'm going to be flipped, and I'm gonna pause, and I'm gonna look at you, and I'm gonna need you to tell me where I need to go. And I'll know everything I need to do from there. And it was almost like this verbal contract that I would sign with a teammate on almost every team that I've been on, it was never the same person, but I'd find that person and who was going to be my helper, right? And she'd be like, Yeah, I got you. And there was no, again, there was acceptance there. And there was no judgment, and I didn't lose any sort of, like, leadership or, or, you know, it wasn't viewed as weak or less than it was like, Okay, this is like this is, you know, a place where you're not as strong and I got your back. And so, for sure, those insecurities, or doubts or lack of confidence came into play. And I had the privilege and pleasure of being on a team, where I could speak, share, advocate and start kind of patching together the places I didn't feel so strong.

Kim Fauskee 12:50

What age did you start trusting your intuition?

Kami Craig 12:54

I think probably much earlier than I would have been able to recognize.

Kim Fauskee 13:00

In Do you remember? Why you did that, or how that felt? Or, because it's one of those things that Dana and I talk quite about a bit about intuition being your best trusted navigator in life. And, you know, our egos always trying to override our intuition. And it was something that I the intuition was something that I felt early on in life, even though I couldn't put my finger on it, as well. So it's interesting to talk to other people that that had that intuition feeling early in life, and then kind of went with it, even though they didn't know what it was,

Kami Craig 13:42

right. And I feel like, you know, intuition was developed and created and born out of this, like necessity to survive, right. And just, again, the intuition was like, I had to read the room because I couldn't read the paper. You know, I'm like, I'm supposed to be doing something right now. I'm not fully understanding the direction. So I'm gonna, like, just notice everything around me. I was meant to leave class, my my normal class to go to resource class at a certain time each day. And I had to read a hand clock, and I didn't know how to read a hand clock. That was one of the things that was a challenge through my dyslexia. And like, like just being aware of like, okay, like, when does like the class typically, you know, shift subjects, like, When are people moving certain ways? Like, who can I ask, okay, I've asked you once, and if I ask you again, you're gonna know I don't know how to read the clock. Like I've asked you what time it is. And so then I'm going to shift to somebody and it was just kind of like this, this pulse and awareness and intuition of, you know, how, how I needed to show up with not knowing all of the instructions, all the facts are not knowing and so I think that helped me kind of like, get through these pieces. periods and times in the classroom, you know, that I needed to get through

Dr. Dana 15:05

that anybody ever made fun of you that anybody noticed? Oh, yeah, they did. Yeah. So despite all the efforts you made to kind of cover it up. There were occasions when somebody noticed.

Kami Craig 15:16

Yeah, and I think, you know, it was less fun, but there was a lot of people who would notice. And I was, again, the amount of vulnerability that you experience so young is, it's, it's painful, you know, I was embarrassed, I was mortified that I wasn't at the same level as my peers. And I had to create different skill sets and tools, I had little, you know, pieces of paper with like, you know, my phone number addresses cheat sheets that I would keep in my wallet that I would have to take out if I was asked to fill out paperwork or things like that. It's really

Dr. Dana 15:53

interesting. When I was a little kid, there were still dinosaurs around. I couldn't spell at all. And I would reverse numbers and letters, but there was no name for it, there was no discussion about it. And I was really lucky that I didn't necessarily use my intuition to help me, I use my memory. So I could get an A on any spelling test that ever came, because I would memorize the words. But if you asked me to spell the word the following week, I would have no idea how to do it. Because it wasn't. I've never learned how to spell but I certainly learned how to memorize. And I'm learning a lot from you just in what you're saying. Because I still get notices from the bank every time I can deposit. Could you please learn how to add before you just send the next one in? Yeah, for

Kami Craig 16:38

right. And what they're asking is like, like, you know, you have you have a difference, like you have a limp. Could you limp a little less, you know, and it's like, no, it's just gonna always be there. I'm sorry, like, doesn't it go away?

Dr. Dana 16:49

I use my calculator. Yeah, I can get the same answer three times in a row. And it's wrong.

Kami Craig 16:57

I chuckled, because you're in my club. Welcome.

Dr. Dana 16:59

You know what, and my kids have always made fun of me, because I, how do you spell that? Or how do you spell it? Because when I look at it, I can't tell that that word is spelled correctly no matter what. But there was no any of this when I was a kid. Yep, it didn't exist.

Kim Fauskee 17:16

That must have been interesting. When you wrote a PhD thesis, then

Dr. Dana 17:19

don't tell anybody but my wife wrote it for me.

Kami Craig 17:23

Everybody needs a support team.

Dr. Dana 17:26

I was smart enough to figure out that I needed to get involved with somebody else to do certain things that I wasn't capable of doing. And luckily, she loved me enough that she could take my fourth grade writing skills and turn them into look like an adult. Oh, mine was very sweet. But I tell everybody that my wife wrote my dissertation.

Kami Craig 17:44

I'm loving your story. My college boyfriend had a master's in writing, you edited, overlooked and helped and held my hand through so many papers. Yeah, it's

Dr. Dana 17:55

I never I've never really thought about this before. Because I mean, the kind of sensitivity that I believe that I developed as a result of knowing that I was really different, but not really understanding why is why I sit in the chair and do what I do. Yeah. It helped me read people just like you're talking about Yep. And it's a way of compensating for a deficit in a way that gives you a huge advantage, actually, people, because you figured out who to ask on the team to help you. Yep. Because some people wouldn't help you. Or they would have made fun of you, or maybe not so much on the level that you got to but generally speaking, kids are not the most kind hearted souls, when it comes to somebody being a little bit different.

Kim Fauskee 18:35

Do you think your observation skills were more enhanced? Absolutely. And do you think that, and again, try not to be an athlete here, but do you think that actually helped you be a better water polo player?

Kami Craig 18:50

Absolutely. Yeah. 100%. And,

Kim Fauskee 18:53

Again, going back to talking about your intuition, how much did your intuition contribute to your success? Overall, what do you think?

Kami Craig 19:03

I think, I mean, I think it's a part of every decision we make, you know, and so I, I also think about the fact that I'm the first in my family to attend and graduate college, I'm the first true I'm the only athlete I'm the first to reach this level of athleticism. And I think about my mom and my dad and myself not knowing anything about anything, right, like, you know, did we get the right bathing suit? are we dropping you off at the right pool? Like what, like recruitment, college applications? You know, it was just it was all new to us. And we would huddle like we were this team of three and we would huddle and you know, like, we would discuss like wow, there's there's an opportunity that you might be recruited to one of these top universities and and then we think, okay, let's figure out how we prepare and get ready for that. And then my Be an opportunity that you make the junior national team, while there might be an opportunity that you will be asked to train with the senior team, while there's an opportunity that you might actually have the opportunity to go to the Olympics. I mean, this wasn't written. You know, I mean, it's not like I had a dad who was like a collegiate athlete and a mom, who was a water polo coach. I mean, it was like we were learning as we were going all the time. And we were taking chances and risks based off of our intuition based off of how my parents were supporting me, based off of like, do we take the chance? Let's go for it. And I think, you know, looking back at that, I think that was intuitively guided, I think my mom throwing me in the pool at three, rather than choosing to medicate me, was an intuitive decision of hers, I think, you know, like, I had to show up in all of these spaces, it was like, these were new, they weren't thought of they weren't premeditated, and I was like, Okay, now I'm like, in college. Now, I'm trying out for my first Olympic team. Now I'm trying, you know, to win a national championship in a D one league, I mean, it just constantly showing up and having to trust yourself. And I forgot what you said, the ego gets in the way of intuition for me. I find my fear can cloud my intuition greatly. It's less my ego, that's precedent and knocking my intuition over, but rather my fear.

Dr. Dana 21:30

So this begs the question, you're, you've retired from professional athletics. So I'm just so curious about what your life looks like now, compared to what it looked like then. Because you know, you have such a strong need and desire to accomplish what most people don't accomplish in a lifetime. And I'm not sure how old you are. No, I'm 34. Okay, so how old were you when you retired from professional athletics? 29. I mean, that's really young to be finished with your first career. Absolutely. And that's when most people are barely, you know, trying to figure out what they want to do with themselves. So a career that reached many Pentacles Yes, yet while most people don't ever come close to what you've accomplished, but, but that makes it even harder to figure out what to do next. Yes, yeah. So I don't know you like Kim does? What does your life look like now? And where's all the energy going? And, yes, and what are you doing with it? And all of that sort of a question,

Kami Craig 22:31

where's all the energy going, because I got a lot of, I think, you know, I just want to lift up and acknowledge that like, the first year and a half, to two years, even to five years out now, there has been moments of clunkiness, great challenges, high anxiety, depressive states, you know, that that that had been experienced as there is a discovery process that's incredibly uncomfortable, after leaving something that has morphed into your identity, you know, and I think everyone's like, you're an athlete, it's not your identity, but I'm like, Man, if I didn't fully put myself into what I was doing, I don't know that I could feel confident that I was going to get my team and myself to the top of the podium, like I was leaving nothing out of the equation. Like how I ate slept, the thoughts I let into my mind how I prepared myself how disciplined I was, I mean, all of that was to hold the dreams of a team and my own dreams and so I'm like I was all in it was my identity, it was my life and everything that I did. And so, big transition, lots of clunkiness and I have experienced an incredible amount of failure in the classroom and athletics and so I'm a little uncomfortable with failure, I'm comfortable and asking for help I'm comfortable with starting again and being like well, we just did a lot of work for nothing, let's clean the slate Let's go again, I've got the I got the endurance and resilience to do that. But what I was experiencing I felt were micro losses. I felt like I was trying on these identity jackets and like looking in the mirror I'm like that's a little tight on my shoulders that doesn't fit right take that off or like that doesn't look you know good on my back. So I gotta take that off for these two sleeves are too short. So I kept trying on these identity jackets and having to take them off and try them on and take them off and every time something felt like it wasn't going to work, I was kind of coming to the conclusion that like this isn't for me this doesn't feel right. I was experiencing these losses and so it was morning and kind of grieving the big identity you know, the tries of what's next and of ventually to the more kind of upbeat of what's going on now is, I found a way to be come more or less a professional teammate. So I was working in the fitness industry doing outside sales. And I was like, Wow, I'm not motivated by money whatsoever. I just want to be connected with people. And this is not my space. I knew within, you know, a few months of working in the company that our company was really ran by fear, it was a very fear driven, I could feel that, like, again, no background in corporate settings, first time having a what, quote unquote, real job. And I immediately could feel where we weren't aligned, what our challenges were going to be and what was going to be disruptive in this team setting in this corporate setting that I was in, realize that wasn't for me, came out. And I started working with a company called RISE athletes where I mentor youth athletes doing mental skill set training. I mean, this probably doesn't shake a stick at how many clients you've had over your life. But I'm pretty proud in the last five years of working over with over 100 young female athletes one on one on mindset, confidence building, exploring their own identity, who are they in the world asking powerful questions, and over in 15 different sports. So it's not just water polo. I also work for a company called mindful warrior where I provide performance coaching and culture design, which is essentially like how do we bring the best out of view and your workspace and your performance and culture design would be team building, right. So that feeling that I felt in my first corporate job. Now I get to feel that for others and help navigate and create, you know, company morals, values and direction,

Dr. Dana 26:45

that's pretty remarkable. Pretty fun. It's as close to being an Olympic athletes as you could get,

Kami Craig 26:50

I would say so. And again, like I get to be professional teammate, I still get to connect, I still all the questions and the thought processes and the curiosities that came with getting to know each teammate, and each team that I was on comes in the work that I'm doing now, I want to know what scares you, I want to know what motivates you, I want to know your why I want to know, you know, what keeps you motivated, what makes you pull back, I want to know all of these things, because that's the power and being a teammate,

Dr. Dana 27:22

you know, I wonder if you realize how different your approach is to, to most, because athletics is obviously a performance oriented discipline. And most people are taught to disconnect from themselves in order to be at their best not to feel what they're feeling. And you do like the exact opposite of what most people are encouraged to do. And yet you've accomplished more than what you're doing with your athletes, it is really incredible. Because again, I occasionally get referred to young people who are in athletics, and mostly what they're taught to do is not feel like they're just how to perform. Yeah. And what matters is, you know, how the coach feels not how you feel right? And that if you're not performing adequately, you're going to be made to feel ashamed of yourself and make you feel like you're letting your team down, which again, is a fear based way of motivating people, which I think is incredibly unhealthy and disrespectful. But that's just the way I think most teams are run. But I don't know if as much as you do about that. But your approach is actually really, really different. Because it matters to help people feel Yes. And you want to teach them how to feel good about themselves, and how to know themselves in a way of being really successful.

Kami Craig 28:33

Yeah, I mean, how do you perform at your best if your own if you're showing up half of who you are a quarter of who you are,

Dr. Dana 28:39

by objectifying yourself and treating yourself like an object? Yeah, that's how most people do it. They don't let themselves feel what it's like, it's really hard for you to imagine a football player could let themselves feel what it's happening to their body when they're on the field.

Kami Craig 28:53

I mean, don't get me wrong, there's a time where you numb yourself out to get through certain practices. For sure, but I think that's different than what you're talking about. It is different. Yeah.

Dr. Dana 29:02

Yeah. It's really interesting to hear your approach in this way. Because mostly what I am trying to do in my work is the same thing you do is to help people understand who they are. And not to worry so much about the performance aspect of things if you're going to perform at your best if you're comfortable with who you are. Yes. And if you know yourself, like you knew yourself, you knew what to do in order to capitalize on your strengths and, and get some help for your weaknesses. And that's not usually the way most athletic programs are run. Yeah, that's true.

Kami Craig 29:35

I would agree. Yeah. And I think those are challenges that I've ran up against. I think there are teams that I couldn't shake, that kind of holding pattern that you're talking about. And I also started realizing too, like I've got to know myself and show up as whole as I possibly can in this process. But so do my teammates so that they're We're not running into fears or insecurities or roadblocks. Like as, as much as I can make myself comfortable in this space, I need to make my teammates feel the same way warmed and welcomed, belonging, trust, respect all that stuff inclusion, because if they don't, all of a sudden, they are there a risk in the process of getting to the top of the podium, right?

Dr. Dana 30:23

Do you never met resistance for people that didn't understand what you were after? Or thought it was a sign of weakness to allow yourself to have your feelings along with your performance?

Kami Craig 30:33

Well, I have a beautiful example of a teammate. And we competed in the 2012 Olympics together and she had left her university to be a part of the process. And everyday was like, I don't want to be here. Rather be at school. I rather be at my sorority, like, I don't want to be here. And it's like, you have the opportunity to train for the Olympic team, like what an honor. But for me, it was clear like, Man, she's scared. She's scared of this not going in the way that she hopes for it to go to be all in is too much of a risk. And I can't mean I come with my energy. I'm like rocking 100 miles an hour. I'm like, positive kami. My teammates are rolling their eyes at me. And like, there's not like I irritated her. Because she didn't want to be there. And I'm like, Of course you do. It's awesome. Here, look around, we're doing it, you know, just trying to find the positive side of that. And I think I never gave up on her. It took me about eight to nine months to break through to her to say like, you know, like, okay, sure you don't want to be here today. But like, we need you. And we trust you. And I didn't have full trust in her. But I knew she needed to know that I trusted her so that she could trust me back. I knew that she needed to know that she was welcomed, and it was safe for her to lean in just a little bit more. I needed her to know that I didn't need her to be perfect, but I needed her to be committed. And so you know, that was many lunches away from the pool. There were many car rides to and from practice and talking. And I was shocked. We were on travel trip. And she looked like she was sharing with the team. The Story of You know, this was really hard. This process is really a hard one for me to commit to. And CAMI is one person that never gave up on me and consistently checked in until the point where I was like, Okay, well, she's not going anywhere. She means well and like I can now open my heart to love and trust and connect. And these are also women who were competing for a spot on the team so I mean, it's it's a crazy balance in the compartmentalizing that goes on in it, whether it's healthy or not. It happens, right?

Kim Fauskee 32:50

How many years from start to finish for waterpolo?

Kami Craig 32:54

Oh 13 To 2913 to

Kim Fauskee 32:59

2916 years? Yeah. Who'd you do it for?

Kami Craig 33:04

I mean, I loved it, I think I loved the water, first of all. So I was doing the swim team initially. And then I found the sport that, like your head, could be above water. And you could talk to people, which I was like, awesome. Like, I get to talk to my friends all day long. But I think initially for me, the love the love of water, the love of movement, getting to show up and be with my teammates every day. Like if they weren't there, I wouldn't have never done what I've done, I would have never accomplished what I accomplished without having those girls to look forward to knowing those girls' toes are going to be on the edge of the deck before jumping in every morning. And, and the fun of like, reach, like setting goals and reaching them and refining. And, you know, I mean, you're learning at the front end of your career, it's clunky. There's a lot of learning to do. On the back end of your career. It's refinement, you're seeing things you hadn't seen before. You're just doing small things you're able to, you know, I was able to have more attention on the team. I mean, my first Olympic Games, it was like deer in the headlights. Just survive and do your job and don't mess up by, you know, the second Olympics. And third, I was very much like what's the pulse of the team? What's the energy of them? What do they need, and even watching the Olympic games at home from the couch for Tokyo 2020. I competed with seven of the girls who were on that team and it was like there was a few challenges they faced which by the way being a spectator is far more difficult than being the player like there is no controlling it right. But you know, there was times where they hit some adversity and I was just like, my mind immediately went like okay, what is this? What is this teammate thinking? What is that teammate thinking? What's the bus ride? Like? What's the energy? In the locker room? What is our head coach sharing? And, you know, I just kind of had a laugh and smiled at myself like it's their journey. Like they, they're gonna find their way through it. And they did. But it was interesting to see what worries or thoughts popped up for me as I was spectating. And that to me clearly was my role when I was on there. It's just kind of dropped right into that.

Kim Fauskee 35:31

So Dana touched a little bit on the transition from being a professional Olympic athlete to being Kami, the everyday citizen not being in the pool every day, not being in the locker room with the girls anymore. Not having the coaching, not having the training staff, and so on and so forth. How did your life change from day one to now five years out?

Kami Craig 35:56

I like to say I'm five years old in this new life, it just kind of seems a little bit easier to give myself some grace in that when I put that perspective lens on. But

Kim Fauskee 36:10

was there I mean, there had to be an immediate loss of identity, right? Because Absolutely, because Google yourself right now, it's going to talk about CAMI Craig, the athletes still absolutely not going to talk about CAMI Craig, the person

Kami Craig 36:23

and I find it in different spaces. I'm like, like, please don't just look at me as an athlete. And then in other spaces, I'm like, Man, it'd be really nice if you could acknowledge Me, for the athlete that I've been, you know, it's just funny how different areas trigger different things. But I think,

Kim Fauskee 36:39

and you have some other life changing events that happened at the same time. Yeah,

Kami Craig 36:43

yeah, absolutely. I think, you know, I broke up with a boyfriend of 10 years. I retired from Yes, my team, my support staff, my community, my movement at such a high level. You know, I had one of my parents go through a major health event, and it felt like my world was crumbling. It was super overwhelming. And I think if I were to reflect on the things that helped me get grounded and find my footing, it is one seeking therapy, and getting professional help. Starting to build community and consistency and communities. So I had a swim group with some fellow Olympians. There was no competition and it was literally like we wake up, we roll out of bed, we meet at the pool at 7am. And we swim, whatever we feel like but really, it was like it was for the locker room talk. It was for the connection. It was to dip ourselves in the water so we could start our day but that community was huge.

Kim Fauskee 37:53

There was no competitiveness amongst Olympic athletes.

Kami Craig 37:57

i Right now I'm like not swimming. But you know, are you gonna have to call you on maybe in the locker room talk but definitely not in assuming we were like wearing fins like we had we had totally put on the handicap.

Kim Fauskee 38:08

Okay, adapter swimming's. Okay, yeah, exactly. So I'm competing that

Kami Craig 38:12

exactly, um, but I mean, get us in a master's water polo setting or where we're playing water polo, like, all competition is revved up. But, you know, getting into masters water polo was part of building community mentors, Kim, you're a mentor of mine, and finding and seeking out mentors, massive in learning, you know, and being exploring and being exposed to potentially what's next. And, you know, just having someone who is sitting alongside of you in those moments of trying on those different identities and exploring and experiencing that grief, mentors were huge, and movement, making sure that I was still moving and that even just relationship with exercising and movement has evolved and changed and morphed into different things. I mean, I'm still kind of thinking like, what's fun for me? And for me, the motivation is like, Okay, I'm not going to train six and a half hours a day, six days a week, like I used to, I'm not going to do the same swim sets, but like, Where does my heart want to go, wants to jump in a pool and swim some laps? Where does my heart want to go? I want to dance until I sweat, I want to play tennis. I want to try different things I want to go hiking. So now I get to use movement as fun. So mentors, therapy, community and movement. Those have been the staples that allowed me to stay grounded and make it through this change.

Kim Fauskee 39:38

Did you have a vision of what retirement was going to look like for you? I mean, it's so weird to say retirement because you were 29 year old person who's retired from a career they've been in for 16 years already. Right. And so you have so much runway and life ahead of you. Did you have a vision of what it looked like? before he retired,

Kami Craig 40:01

yeah, I knew I was gonna retire like I, that was my choice to retire at the time that I did. So it was planned. The retirement was planned the steps after retirement, maybe it wasn't so planned. But yeah, like my vision was like, Oh, I'm going to work for this company. I've been talking to them a little bit while I have been playing water polo, I'm going to work for them. It's going to be awesome. It'll be my dream job. I'll work with them forever. And that's it. That's what's next for kami. What a small way of thinking right. So much learning to come. And that was not even close to how it unraveled.

Kim Fauskee 40:39

You've been engrossed in something for so long, I don't see how you could have not have another vision of what you what you had, though. Because, yes, you're right. Your perspective has always been in sport and competing in sport, and it's like, okay, now I gotta figure this out. And this is what I know.

Kami Craig 41:00

Yeah. And the idea of like, really like, I mean, I got through some rough teams, rough coaches, rough seasons, and I never gave up. So this idea of trying on these new roles or identities, and being able to have the clarity of understanding, when you are saying you had enough, you're choosing to walk away for or it's not for you. I thought what was not for me was meat giving up. And it was simply like, I haven't learned I haven't arrived at what is my next lane or adventure yet. And so this isn't giving up. This actually is just saying, like, this isn't for me, and that I hadn't I hadn't developed that muscle yet. And I had to do that through that time of transition.

Kim Fauskee 41:52

I think early on in your transition you did suffer from some depression. Yeah. And got pretty low. Yep. Right. Can you talk about that? A little bit?

Kami Craig 42:01

Yeah, definitely, I think, you know, six months after to a year, it was hard to wake up, I didn't have a job to go to, I didn't have anywhere to be. And so, I mean, that felt really disorienting. And, I mean, it was just enough to kind of get out of bed and look myself in the face and take a shower and decide, like, I'm gonna get dressed today to do what, like, nothing, you know. And so it was easy to kind of slip into the patterns of just, you know, I was over scheduling myself because I was afraid to be alone. I was, you know, and that that led into the evenings and the nights of just like, so I would be busy hanging out with people all day making sure that I was always had something to do I party all night, I get, you know, crummy sleep. I was drinking and, you know, like just actually probably living the life that I would have at 20 or 21. Right? Like, yeah, at 29. And just, you know, celebrating, I just want a gold medal. And so there's events and things to do. But there was no routine, there was no structure, there was no grounding in that. And it was at a time where I wanted my boyfriend at the time to take away the pain.

And tell me what to do, someone freaking tell me what to do. I was terrified of making a decision. I was terrified of being alone.

Kim Fauskee 43:26

Well, are you I mean, it goes back to being an athlete, right? You show what you show up to practice, you know what that practice is gonna be, you know what you're going to have to wear in the pool, you know, all this stuff. And everything's kind of done for you. You just have to go out and perform. Yep. And now you're out in the real world having to do everything on your own.

Kami Craig 43:44

Yeah, yeah. And so I think I wanted someone to tell me what to do. I wanted someone to tell me it was okay. I wanted someone to like, put on that new identity that was going to feel right for me. And I put that on my boyfriend at the time I put that on my parents. I you know, like a little bit, put that on some friends and slow drip it to some teammates, but that was like not. I mean, really, the burden was on my boyfriend and my parents at the time. And it just led to fight after fight after fight and friction. And, you know, because I think both my parents and my boyfriend loved me so deeply and wanted to take the pain that I was experiencing away. But I was the one who had to do it. And there was a moment where I was just feeling low. I grabbed some dinner. I drove to the beach and was staring out at the ocean. I had my mom messaging me and I remember telling her I was like, I don't want to do this. She was like, do what and I was like, I don't want to do this life. Like I have no income. I have no health insurance. I have no boyfriend. I can barely pay my rent right now. Because you know, like I I'm not I don't have any source of income. I've got no direction, no meaning no purpose. Like, what's the point here? And that's, you know, that thought, in itself scared me enough to know that. Like, my mom wasn't gonna fix it, my boyfriend wasn't going to fix it, I was the one responsible to start taking these steps forward. And that's when the first call and introduction to my therapist happened. And that was the day that I, you know, found my footing and was able to start kind of climbing up.

Kim Fauskee 45:26

It's interesting that you figured that out so quickly, that you couldn't project that upon somebody else to fix you that that you knew it was gonna have to be you to do that. Yeah. How did you come? How did you come to that realization, I know, you just told the story about sitting at the beach, and so on and so forth. And, and but I just don't get that it probably just popped into your head. Yeah, you maybe knew all along, but it just took you to get to where you're back was against the wall to say, Okay, now I need help.

Kami Craig 45:57

I think it was a lot of deep discussion and a lot of, like, arguments with the people closest to me. And, you know, like, me kind of throwing the ask out on to my parents and then being like, you know, they didn't know how to solve it as much as they wanted to, or, you know, arguments with my boyfriend. And, you know, I mean, this was a lot of self reflection and a lot of wandering, and, you know, in those conversations, but they would go in circles, and I throw it on them, and they couldn't catch it.

Kim Fauskee 46:33

So had you done that as an athlete, as an Olympic athlete, and so on and so forth, had those discussions in your head and had done some self discovery before in that way, and kind of trying to figure out who you were at that moment, or who you want it to be in so on and so forth. I mean, this was not a new exercise here, was it?

Kami Craig 46:53

At the time, when I think it was even more like, what do I do? Tell me what to do? And nobody could tell me what to do.

Kim Fauskee 46:59

Right? So you had to figure it out on your own then or nobody figured out, I just

Kami Craig 47:03

realized that my questions and the pushing and the wandering wasn't being met. And it's really uncomfortable to hang in the air like that. And so it was enough of like, pushing on them. And they weren't pushing back, they just, there was just nothing to give back. Other than their ears. And again, I was asking for them to create, find the solution in the words that I was sharing with them. And they simply were like, you know, like, what they were giving me wasn't like it was good and not good enough. But it was like it wasn't meeting me. And so I just kind of felt like I was hanging out there by myself. And I was like, I don't want to feel this way anymore. At

Kim Fauskee 47:44

least you have their love and support, though, at least you absolutely,

Kami Craig 47:47

absolutely. But I'm saying I have so much compassion, and so much empathy for my boyfriend at the time and my parents for their courage and how they showed up and try to meet me in that space. Because it as hard as it was for me, it was equally as hard for them.

Kim Fauskee 48:08

I want Dana to talk a little bit about the therapy approach to that. In a previous podcast, we've talked about how some therapists will pathologize you right in that way and kind of make it when you come in say, Well, I have this issue or I have this problem. They're right. Yeah, you do have a problem. And it's you. Right. And Dana eloquently talks about kind of his style of therapy and what works within his practice of, of making it more of an arts I'm kind of interested in in Dana's perspective, I'm going

Dr. Dana 48:42

to answer your question, but maybe somewhat indirectly, because it sounds like you had a crisis of loss of faith in a certain way. I don't know if you've ever looked at it from that perspective, because when you're connected to your intuition on a really deep level, and again, this is my belief system that, that I look at your your intuition is the voice of God that lives inside of you. And I'm not talking about a religious scholar I'm just talking about will however, you might want to define that. And that whatever questions and inspiration and information that you might need, that you learned how to tap into that at a very early age, and you had a lot of faith in yourself in that way. And all of a sudden, the worlds upside

down and you can't rely on your faith the way they used to. So what it seems like to me is that you had a crisis where you lost your faith and you didn't, you didn't know what to do with yourself that you were really very much lost. And you look to other people to tell you sort of what the answer was. And then eventually it sounds like you got to a place where you were able to tap into your own inner resilience and faith again, is that a fair way to describe it that definitely

Kami Craig 49:50

lands and I think even like earlier in our discussion is like fear has always clouded that intuition or that connection as it does for everyone and I was riddled with it right?

Dr. Dana 50:00

How could you not? Yeah, yeah. I'm wondering, did anybody ever sort of introduced that notion to you that this was not a like, what do I do with myself? But how do I reconnect with myself in a way where I can have faith in myself again and feel really deeply connected to myself, regardless of what I'm or how I'm performing in the world? Yeah.

Kami Craig 50:19

I think yes, maybe not specifically in those words, but just learning how to create space and grace and acceptance of where we're at, at the moment. Because I was, in my mind, needing to be everywhere, but where I was. So just landing in it sitting in the emotion, feeling it stop running from it, but just allowing that space to be okay. I was never told that was okay. Right. You know, and, and I was in such a forward thinking. Like, I was just like, what does the future hold? That's what I was pressing on my support team. And so they were trying to solve for like, Okay, what does the future hold? So they weren't present with me, either. They were trying to solve for what I was trying to solve for, because that's what I was asking for.

Kim Fauskee 51:03

You make an important point, because we've talked about this and self examination, really, the important point is sitting in your shed, yeah. Right. You can't be 10 miles, 50 miles down the road, right, you have to sit in your shit. And you have to feel what it feels like. And you have to work through those emotions to be able to get that clarity that you need that sustainable to move forward.

Kami Craig 51:27

Right. And I think in my fear, I was abandoning myself, I was trying to get to this future self that wasn't there. And I needed to show up for myself. And that was the first step of that day where I was like, wow, like, I'm, I'm out here hanging by myself. This is terrifying. This is uncomfortable. And I got to figure out like, I think I need help. I need support. I need someone to meet me here. You know,

Dr. Dana 51:51

the person that you see help you rediscover your faith in yourself?

Kami Craig 51:55

Yes, I would say so.

Dr. Dana 51:56

That's what it sounds like. Yeah. Because, again, we can handle almost anything, but almost anything, if we don't feel like we have to do it alone. Yep. And a lot of times, you know, people, we all have answers for each other about what, like, if I did everything everybody told me to do, because of my health problems. I go to a different doctor every day, there's not enough time in the year to get to go to all the people that I've been told I should go see in order to help whatever it is that ails me. None of that has been helpful at all. What helps you the most is to know that I'm not alone in my pain, and whatever that might be. And that is that people feel connected to me. And they can tell that I'm suffering, but they're not trying to make it go away to make themselves feel better, right. And I'm assuming that your parents, and this is what parents do home repair, and I would do anything that saves my children from pain, yes. And a lot of times that prevents them from discovering the solution that they need to come to. Yes. And some of it, about them. It's about me feeling terrified that my children are suffering. So it's really lovely to see that you were able to regain your faith, at least that's what it sounds like. Yeah,

Kami Craig 53:10

absolutely. And I think you hit the nail on the head with my parents wanting to take away the pain and finding a solution for me. And I think that's really common, and athletes who are going through a transition to feel distant, disconnected or friction with their close support teams, because, you know, or support groups, because that's, that's what I experienced, it's actually quite common, you know, to a lot of a lot of that. And again, I feel for families and those close to athletes who are going through transition. And yeah, I think, you know, some of the most powerful stuff within my sessions with my therapist was just her accepting me. And, and I'm like, Oh, we're cool here. Like, I'm not a total mess up, you know, like, I'm okay, right here. And she's like, Oh, you're okay. I was like, Okay.

Dr. Dana 53:58

Well, I mean, that illustrates the point that Kim was making is that, you know, so many people I see, go to therapy, they believe there's something wrong with them. Therapists agrees. They diagnose Yep, you come up with a terrible term that makes you sound like you're like you're crazy. Yep. And then we come up with a treatment plan to heal what ails you. And to me, it's just so disrespectful because it doesn't take into consideration that you're actually a human being right and that you're suffering, right. And you don't need to be diagnosed or told there's something wrong with you, which your therapist told you is that actually you're pretty cool. Just yeah, you are right now, it's time based on how you perform in the world. You don't have to be a gold medal Olympian in order for people to love You and to be connected to you, right? They love what you've done. But it's you but it's not you at the same time. That's what that's right. That's right. Yep. But that frees you up to figure out without other stuff you might be capable of that might bring you a different type of joy and, and a sense of fulfillment because you can't do what you used to do in order to get that feeling of Have I can't even imagine how wonderful would feel. Yeah, you know, to be in a situation like that to achieve the ultimate in whatever it is you're doing. I mean, to me, you know, if I could just surf on a really good wave and not fall down, it would be wonderful. Yes,

Kami Craig 55:14

yes, no, absolutely. And I think just the the space, the permission, the space and the permission, and the pacing, that I received through therapy was really powerful during that time, and if I can create

space permission and pacing for the athletes, or individuals that I'm working for, or working with is, is that I can get a high, I can get a high through making those connections. Because as much as if it was about playing water polo, and putting the ball on the back of the neck net, it was a lot about the connections I was making, and like making those micro breakthroughs,

Dr. Dana 55:55

what you're showing the people that you work with what it feels like to be loved. And lots of times, people have no idea what that feels like, yeah, because our upbringing is so performance oriented, that we only feel approved off, not necessarily loved when we accomplish things with our parents or whoever the expectations come from achieve. But that's not the same thing as love. And it sounds like when you approach people, it's not just about the performance, but it's teaching them how to, how to feel what it's like to maybe love yourself a little bit. And to feel love from you. Because you're not just focusing on their performance, you're trying to help them feel good about themselves as people. Yeah. Which is hugely lacking in our world. Yes, for sure. In the big way.

Kim Fauskee 56:40

So your five year old self or five years out from retirement? Yes. Who's Cami? Craig the person now?

Kami Craig 56:49

Yeah, well, I think, you know, that's a process that's always evolving, and I'm always discovering, but I, it's been pretty cool to get to know myself. And to be able to I think, you know, as an athlete, especially in the pocket of training for 13 years, the national team, there's like a hardening that happens, you know, there's like, you kind of have to like hold, you can't unravel completely. And so I think that there are softer parts of me that have that there's space now to come to the surface, the armor is off. Yeah, the armor is off, and I get to choose when I want to put it on rather than having to like to sleep in it right. And like, I'm like alarms going off, like the armor is on let's go you know. So I think I get to choose when I want to armor up and really feel safe and secure and my softness and openness and vulnerability. You know, I feel a lot more connected to myself. There's more time for self care and curiosity and you know, more time to explore different things, you know, I've done therapy, I've done retreats, I've done mindfulness practice, you know, all of the trainings that I've done really have allowed me to experience them so that I can teach them or use them in my coaching and mentoring practices. And I really think the work that I've done with myself and the self-discovery and just being open and curious about different things that maybe necessarily I didn't have time or space or actually care to do when I was training full time. Like I was cool, like I had the team, I had the workouts and all that stuff. But um you know, I think I'm an understanding person. I think that you know, growing up with learning disabilities really has provided me with an openness and a non being non judgmental, I think that I'm still possess a warriorship and a, like elite level of performance, there's still a lot of Rev and competitiveness in me, but in a way where it can be fun and a part of me and flow through me rather than all of me. Which is it's just been fun to experience but it's been fun to get getting to know myself and trying new things.

Kim Fauskee 59:23

It's been an honor for me to know you for all these years and through your transition out of sport as well. You You You're very vulnerable. You're very genuine. You're very, you're very transparent. And I think the areas that you're working in now not only with Rhys athletes and and my daughter was a

benefit from your mentorship while she was a volleyball player at Santa Barbara High. And I know that she valued that relationship when she would race home to get on the phone with you at that time. So I think that Uh, you know, we found our tribal, we found our niche, I think you found your niche, you know, again, that we think sometimes athletes have to fall back into athlete careers even when they're done playing sport. But But again, with that genuineness and just being that caring individual that you are, not only in the corporate world will benefit from it, but these young athletes will benefit from it as well. We've got just a couple more minutes here to talk to you. And so I'm kind of interested in in as you continue through this self discovery process, and obviously, you've you've told our audience, how beneficial that has been for you, not only as an Olympic athlete, but but in your post career endeavors as well. And, and trying to make it through life and getting up every day and taking on this world. What are a couple of your biggest takeaways that you would want people to know, from that?

Kami Craig 1:01:00

Yeah, I think I'd love to just kind of borrow from your words of faith. Like I think having faith in the process, I think, knowing that self discovery, like you're the only one that can do it for yourself. And, and what I mean, that is like, you're the only one that can show up and start putting in the work to learn more about yourself to, to do the healing, to do the, the exploring to be curious about yourself, no one, people can do it for you all day around you, but but you're the one that needs to show up to make to make change. And that I think community is so so valuable. I know that we've all been impacted and affected by that in this last year of COVID. But just connection and community, and, and movement in any sort of level. I think those takeaways, I like if I can stay grounded in, in my own self care, in my own self discovery in my community, and in my movement, I'm like, seems so simple, just three things just do that. Right. But I would say I would have a grounded and fulfilling life, you know?

Kim Fauskee 1:02:22

Well, it's very well said, and it's been an honor and a privilege to have you here. Thank you.

Kami Craig 1:02:25

Thank you so much. Thank

Dr. Dana 1:02:26

you very much.

Kim Fauskee 1:02:28

So that was a very insightful hour with with CAMI Craig. And I know, Dana, that she made a couple of points that you want to discuss a little bit further before we close out this episode.

Dr. Dana 1:02:40

You know, Kim, the things that I noticed most clearly in what she was talking about was that at a very young age, she was able to connect with your intuition in such a powerful way. And that's fairly remarkable for a young person to trust their intuition at such an early age. And it seemed like when she had to leave being an athlete leave that career behind that she actually had a crisis of faith as much as anything else. And that as soon as she rediscovered her intuition and her faith, she has found a path for herself again, and I just wanted to, to reiterate to everyone home, again, how much you and I think or

feel about being connected to your intuition and how valuable it is that we have a very sacred relationship without a part of ourselves and she is someone who absolutely demonstrates that as profoundly as anybody I've ever met.

Kim Fauskee 1:03:35

I agree with you, she definitely has found a path and, and self examination was an important piece for her to be on that journey. And, and again, we appreciate our candidness and transparency and your genuineness and we'll see you on the next episode.

Fear Me Out 1:03:55

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