

# Think Tank: How to get goin' when the goin' gets tough

## Speakers:

**Amy Hopkins, LCSW**

**Mike Hopkins**

Amy Hopkins: You may not know this, but we all have a super power. It's our ability to learn and grow and become more resilient. We all go through tough times. Sometimes they seem unbearable, but we do get stronger with each powerful wind. We dig in, we persist, we grow. Welcome to The Think Tank podcast.

Amy Hopkins: Hi, everyone. This is Amy Hopkins. I am a licensed clinical social worker, and today who are doing the podcast a little differently. We're talking about how to keep going when the going gets tough. We're talking about resiliency. And resiliency really is about how you pick yourself up after you fall, how do you cope with things that come into your life, how do you make yourself stronger?

Amy Hopkins: So what I did is I had a conversation. With my husband and I hope you'll listen to this conversation with my husband, Mike and hear some themes that we both did individually and separately to try and become stronger and work through difficult times.

Amy Hopkins: Hi everybody. This is Amy, and I'm here with Mike.

Mike Hopkins: Hello, everybody.

Amy Hopkins: And our four dogs. So you might hear some dog noises in the back, but they go everywhere we do.

Amy Hopkins: So, today, Mike and I are just going to have a conversation with each other about building resiliency and what we've done kind of in the past couple of years to work on building our relationship and building ourselves.

Amy Hopkins: So, just a quick summary, Mike and I have been together for about 23 years and married for 20-

Mike Hopkins: In June.

Amy Hopkins: 20 years this June. And we have two children and we have four dogs and they are all around us.

Amy Hopkins: So, in the very end of 2019, we found out that Mike had cancer. So we started 2020 off with a bang with a major surgery and then going through all of the rehab and stuff with that. And then he had a couple other major surgeries because he's a bucket of bolts and had to have some other surgeries in that time as well. So it was really hard on both of us and we both didn't cope with it very well. Would you say? I mean-

Mike Hopkins: It was a struggle for sure. Even old problems that had maybe been a part of things had kind of come to a head at that point because everything was so stressful. So yes, it was very difficult.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. We didn't do very well. We kind of stopped communicating and just, I think honestly, for me, it was just, it was all too much. And then you went inward. You didn't-

Mike Hopkins: Very much.

Amy Hopkins: Very much, yeah. You went inward, and I took that as... We stopped communicating. We just stopped communicating. And so then we realized that we needed to do something different and got into some therapy individually and then had some sessions together, and I think that really helped us. I mean, we never didn't want to stay married, we just knew that things had changed, right?

Mike Hopkins: Right. Right. Yeah, it was just the struggles. It was never a matter of not feeling for each other, it was just a matter of losing touch, not paying attention like we should have. And then with all of the things that came on us all at once, it was just really overwhelming and it came close to being a really big problem, but we did fight our way through it.

Amy Hopkins: Right. Right. And I think the big thing too was it was just like everything that could go wrong kind of felt like it went wrong. And then we had COVID hit. So we were not just isolating from each other, we were physically having to isolate from the people that supported us and all of that. And so there was just, again, everything that kind of could go wrong did go wrong.

Amy Hopkins: So then we decided we were going to work together and try and figure this out together. And then we got some more bad news and we found out that Mike's cancer is back and it's metastasized. So he has stage

four cancer and we've just started chemotherapy and we're going through that.

Amy Hopkins: So anyway, just kind of wanted to give a little bit of a backstory as to how we got here and why we want to talk about what's worked for us. And not that we're experts at it yet. We're just kind of fumbling through.

Mike Hopkins: Yeah, it's definitely a learning experience. It's a mystery. Neither one of us have ever been close to these kinds of things in our family. And you don't realize exactly how many things are going to change and be affected by these types of things. And like Amy said, COVID was just another element to all of it. So it's been a year, for sure.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. It's been a couple of years. So I'm just going to ask you, I mean, I think I know some of these answers, but I may be surprised by some of them. So tell me what you have in the past two years, not just with the cancer and with the surgeries and COVID and being a dad and being a husband and all of that, when you're looking back at how hard it's been, what would you say got you through those times?

Mike Hopkins: I would say that the main thing is realizing that you have to use your support system. And I think I had definitely, prior to being so sick and all of the bad things coming along, had kind of forgotten about who the important people were and was a little selfish about what I was doing. And it wakes you up.

Mike Hopkins: But that's the number one thing. I go to treatments and see people that are there by themselves, and I haven't really had to go to anything by myself yet, and I feel bad for them because I think they must not have people or maybe they don't want it, I'm not sure. But to have support is so amazing. Even if you have somebody sitting there and they're not even talking to you, they're just there, it's supportive.

Mike Hopkins: And then attitude, attitude is absolutely everything. And it's hard to keep your attitude good because there are times when you feel really awful. But I think a lot of years ago, I had somebody tell me something about this thing called self-talk, and basically just the way you speak to yourself. And so I try to pay a lot of attention to the things that I say to myself.

Mike Hopkins: And also, probably one of my biggest things, and this always makes me emotional, but there are a lot of people in my life and in my past that inspire me. So that makes a big difference for me to think about what they've been through and are going through. And so I think about

that a lot. And I think everybody could find that in their lives, and that would be important when you're going through something like this. It's hard because people want to help and they have advice and they have things that they want to say, and you just have to take some of it with a grain of sand, I guess, but that's still great because every vibe is a good vibe as far as I'm concerned.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. So you had to learn, I mean, you're a pretty independent guy, and so you had to learn how to rely on people and let them do things for you. And I know for me, with everything that's happened, I've learned about myself that I need two things that are like polar opposites of themselves. I need time alone so I can get centered and take care of myself, and then I really need people. So I also need that kind of support system.

Amy Hopkins: And we are very lucky. We are very lucky. We have a lot of people who love and support us. And even though we haven't been able to see a lot of them because of COVID and wanting to be careful with your immune system and stuff, we get a lot of positive support from people.

Mike Hopkins: For sure.

Amy Hopkins: And we've had a lot of positivity just coming from the people I work with and the people that you've worked with.

Mike Hopkins: Incredible support.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. So we've been really lucky that way.

Amy Hopkins: So the other thing I just wanted to point out that maybe you didn't talk about was that you do need sometimes just to kind of disengage from your thoughts because it can be overwhelming to sit with this, to sit with everything that we're going through right now. So I know sometimes you just kind of have to detach. So tell everybody what you do there.

Mike Hopkins: Well, probably more often than not, I get onto my tablet or something and play a really basic puzzle game or something kind of simple that doesn't take a whole bunch of thought and doesn't make me feel any kind of stress, but just completely distracts me from everything because I'm just literally putting shapes of blocks together to try to build a stack. And there's a little bit of competitive trying to build your score or whatever, but it really isn't that. It's just very simple, something that just distracts me.

Mike Hopkins: And I find I enjoy watching something on television that's old, like an old sit-com or an old movie or something because they're so simple and they're not crazy crazy like a lot of the things are nowadays.

Mike Hopkins: But yeah, I think that's probably what Amy was kind of thinking of because she's seen me get pretty distracted by these games and maybe I should be paying attention to something, but yeah, that's something I definitely use.

Mike Hopkins: And then probably my dogs are a huge distraction and comfort. And I call them my therapy dogs because as soon as you sit down and relax and put your legs up or whatever, they are there. They want to be up on and be warm and cozy. And so, it's really common to have three dogs on your lap, and I can't think of a better thing to make you feel better than that.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. They are just pure unconditional love. There's absolutely no doubt about that.

Mike Hopkins: I mean, there's four of them and it's crazy sometimes, but they are the best thing.

Amy Hopkins: Yeah. So, for us, building resiliency was really about learning how to take care of each other, take care of ourselves.

Mike Hopkins: Yeah. Well, I think we both... It's so common for a long-term relationship to get a little stagnant or whatever and I think some things had happened to us. And then when all of this came along, that stuff was still there. We were still dealing with some things. And not a horrible situation that our marriage was failing or anything, just stuff we needed to probably be aware of, and this knocked us both on the side of the head. And we thought a lot about ourselves and we thought a lot about each other and how we would go about proceeding in the future. And this stuff certainly had an effect on us. It couldn't help, but I think it helped us to open up our eyes and realize we need to work on us. And we did. It's been a lot better.

Amy Hopkins: It has. I know for me, so I need personal time. I need time for myself and I need people. I need to have people around me. I know for the personal time and the alone, one of the things that I have been doing is walking, and that has been really helpful for me. There's so much good that can come from just 20 minutes a day of exercising, even if it's a slow pace or whatever, just getting out, getting fresh air, and just moving my body has made a big difference in how I feel overall.

Amy Hopkins: We also have kind of wrapped our arms I think tighter around our kids too.

Mike Hopkins: Yeah, that's true.

Amy Hopkins: Because again, we have limited contact with the outside world, which has just forced us to do more things with our teenagers than they probably want, but they seem to have benefited from us taking extra time with them, spending time with them, learning from them, talking to them. So I think that too has been really good, just recognizing the importance of family. And who is texting you? Goodness.

Mike Hopkins: It's our daughter.

Amy Hopkins: Aw. Aw. How sweet.

Mike Hopkins: She sends me those every day. She [inaudible 00:14:56]

Amy Hopkins: Oh my gosh. Now she's sending them to me. Ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding, ding.

Amy Hopkins: Okay. Well, I appreciate you taking the time with me, and maybe we'll have you back as a surprise guests sometime in the future.

Mike Hopkins: Okay.

Amy Hopkins: So you can see from this conversation that I had with my husband, Mike, that there are some definite themes that we both do together, separately. Some of those things I just want to point out is the absolute importance of having emotional support. We actually talked about that on our last podcast. So that's going to come into play a lot when it comes to dealing with tough times. You need people around you that build you up, that support you and help you along the way.

Amy Hopkins: Another thing that you may have heard is the importance of being positive, that you've got to find the silver lining sometimes. It's hard to find the silver lining, but you've got to find it. That kind of goes to that attitude of gratitude, how many things are good in your life.

Amy Hopkins: We talked about things that we do to relieve stress, how Mike disengages sometimes, how I need to disengage, maybe take time alone. And we talk about just kind of being kind and forgiving to ourselves. Life is hard. There's no points for suffering. Sometimes you just have to say it is what it is and be kind to yourself and move forward.

Amy Hopkins: So I really hope that our story helped inspire you and give you ideas on how you can become more resilient. We need to really experience and revel in the good times so when things feel overwhelming, we have tools, we have memories and we have skills to rely on to keep us going.

Amy Hopkins: I hope you'll take some time today and figure out how to build up your super power of resiliency, figure out what helps you stay grounded, helps you grow and makes you strong. Thank you for joining The Think Tank podcast. See you next time.

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