

The Tim Ferriss Show Transcripts

Episode 145: Cal Fussman

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Tim Ferriss: Hello boys and girls. This is Tim Ferriss. Welcome to another episode of the Tim Ferriss show, where it is my job to deconstruct world class performers of various types from all fields including entertainment, military, academia, research, and otherwise, sports, etc. This episode is a very special one and features a verbal Jedi who never really gets interviewed himself, Cal Fussman.

You may not recognize that name, but that is going to change. Cal Fussman, @ Cal Fussman, C-A-L F-U-S-S-M-A-N on the Twitters, is a New York Times best selling author and writer at large for *Esquire Magazine*, where he's best known for being a primary writer of the "What I Learned" feature. Now, What I Learned, what is this? Well, it is comprised of interviews with icons that you'll recognize. *The Austin Chronicle* described Cal's interviewing skills as quote peerless, end quote and I would have to agree with that.

I've met a great many writers and interviewers and Cal is just hands and heads above everyone else. I'm not sure if that makes nay sense; I've had quite a bit of wine. It is about 1 in the morning in New York City in the land of chaos, and that sounds like the right expression to use.

In any case, Cal has transformed oral history into an art form, conducting probing interviews with icons who've shaped the last 50 years of world history, including Mikhail Gorbachev, Jimmy Carter, Ted Kennedy, Jeff Bezos, Richard Branson, Jack Welch, Robert De Niro, Clint Eastwood, Al Pacino, George Clooney, Leo DiCaprio, Tom Hanks, Bruce Springsteen, Dr. Drew, Quincy Jones, Woody Allen, Barbara Walters, Pelé, Yao Ming, Serena Williams, John Wood and Mohammed Ali and countless others.

Born in Brooklyn, and this is the part where the bio sounds unbelievable, and as far as I can tell, it's totally true. Here we go. Born in Brooklyn, Cal spent ten straight years traveling the world, swimming over 18 foot tiger sharks, rolling around with mountain gorillas in Rwanda, and searching for gold in the Amazon. He's also made himself a guinea pig. He's boxed against world

champion Julio Cesar Chavez when he was undefeated and served as a sommelier atop the World Trade Center.

He now lives with his wife, whom he met while on a quest to discover the world's most beautiful beach and has three children in Los Angeles, where he spends every morning eating breakfast with Larry King. And that is, in fact, how I met Cal for the first time was at this particular breakfast at a Jewish deli with Larry King, where Larry eats honey nut Cheerios and that is it. Go figure.

In any case, you guys have to check out Cal. I really loved this conversation. He's been a mentor to me in this game of interviewing and asking questions, which is really about not just probing into the lives of others but thinking more clearly yourself. And Cal is really the Obi-Wan Kenobi of this particular area of expertise.

So I hope you enjoy. Check him out. I want to help out Cal. He is doing a lot of interesting stuff at expanding outside of writing. So be sure to check out his website, CalFussman, C-A-L F-U-S-S-M-A-N dot com. Say hello. On Twitter as well, @CalFussman. And without further ado, as I always say after a long intro, please enjoy my conversation with Cal Fussman.

Tim Ferriss: Cal, welcome to the show.

Cal Fussman: Thank you. I have arrived.

Tim Ferriss: You have arrived and I'm so excited to have you here because we've gotten to know each other a bit over the last however many months. And it's been such a joy because as I've tried to delve into this craft of asking questions and crafting conversation, I've realized there's a lot to it. And I've been a fan of your work for so many years. The subtleties are just so powerful and I thought this time we could turn the tables and I could interrogate you in public.

I love asking you questions about your process and you've been so generous with your time in terms of reviewing some of my episodes, providing feedback. So first and foremost, thank you for your work and for all of the help.

Cal Fussman: I'm delighted. You're good. You're good.

Tim Ferriss: I think I have a lot of room to improve. This is one of these episodes where I'm a little self conscious because I know that I have a very unusual memento-like, sometimes non chronological

approach to interviews. And for that, I'll apologize in advance. But we can do a post game analysis afterwards.

Perhaps we could just start with something that we were discussing before we hit record. We were talking about the live event that was here in LA at the Troubadour. We were doing a bit of analysis, what went well, what didn't go as well as planned, and so on. I mentioned that, I suppose due to also some insecurities of a sort, that I try to, when I do these rare live events, if it's, say, two hours long I'll stay for an additional two or three hours and do Q&A or something like that.

And you said that's straight out of Quincy Jones's book. I know this is an unusual place to start, but maybe you could just provide that anecdote because it seems like you have an endless trove of these types of anecdotes. But why Quincy Jones?

Cal Fussman: Quincy Jones will go to a book signing and there will be long lines of people. He will not sign his name and, move them on, next. He will stop, ask everyone who they are, engage in a conversation and then write a personal note in his book to them. And the line may be around the block; he'll be there until 3 in the morning, keeping the people at Barnes & Noble open because he wants to make it a joyous experience for everybody. So bravo; you've followed the master.

Tim Ferriss: Inadvertently. The story, of course, if we rewind the clock, begins at the beginning. Where did you grow up? I actually am ashamed to know I don't know the childhood background. Where did you grow up?

Cal Fussman: I'm born in Brooklyn and moved to Yonkers, New York, where I did second grade and third grade. That's where I had, when I think back on it, like a pivotal moment asking questions. Because that time, second grade, was the time that I was sitting in Miss Jaffe's classroom, and she came into the room – she was out for some reason. When she came in, you could look at her and know something just happened that I don't know but it's different from anything I've ever seen before. This was November, 1963, and it was Miss Jaffee who told the class that President Kennedy had been shot.

And so we all got sent home, found out that he had died. And I really would love to see myself on videotape that night. Because I knew, man, something is going on here. They explained to me that Lyndon Johnson was the vice president, and he was now to

become the new president. And I'm thinking, man, what must it be like to be that guy? What is he feeling? I know he probably wanted to be the president, but he couldn't be the president. And then he was the vice president, and now the president gets killed and he gets to be the president.

So I picked up a piece of paper and a pencil, and I just wrote to Lyndon Johnson.

Tim Ferriss: You wrote a letter to Lyndon Johnson?

Cal Fussman: I wrote a letter to Lyndon Johnson and said, what does it feel like? And about six months later, I got a letter back.

Tim Ferriss: That's incredible.

Cal Fussman: And it was from his personal secretary, Juantia D. Roberts, and the cool thing about it was the first sentence was: thank you for the friendly thought in writing. So I don't know what I wrote him but somehow I must have tried to make him feel comfortable that this question was coming. And then the second question was: in answer to your query... What that said was she was treating me like I was legit. I had just turned seven...

Tim Ferriss: Bonafide adult.

Cal Fussman: Exactly. And you know, when you did the interview with Ed Norton, he talked about having a mentor in high school who treated him like an adult.

Tim Ferriss: That's right.

Cal Fussman: And that is what that letter felt like to me. And only now, when people are starting to ask me questions, did this come to me. But that's when I realized that asking questions is kind of natural for me.

Tim Ferriss: So that was in second grade?

Cal Fussman: Second grade.

Tim Ferriss: I have to ask. When you wrote the letter, something back to second grade. Was it written on paper that had the dotted line in between the intact lines for the lower case letters? Do you recall what kind of paper it was on?

Cal Fussman: I don't know. It was probably on loose-leaf paper, if I was making a guess. I was talking to the historian Robert Caro, who wrote volumes about Lyndon Johnson.

Tim Ferriss: Also wrote *The Power Broker*, am I right?

Cal Fussman: That's right.

Tim Ferriss: Incredible book.

Cal Fussman: Exactly. This guy has spent decades knowing everything about Lyndon Johnson as possible. And I'm telling him this story, and he's like getting goose bumps when I say Juanita D. Roberts. You got a letter from Juanita D. Roberts? He started asking me all these questions about the letter, and where it could be, and how I sent it. And I realized, as he was doing it, yeah, he was made to be a historian. Nobody else in the world would have gotten that high over the words Juanita D. Roberts.

But some people are just born with the proclivity to do certain things.

Tim Ferriss: What do you think, even if it's God given talent, what gives you a gift for questions?

Cal Fussman: I think part of that has to do with the evolution as an interviewer, as a journalist. Because as we talk it through, you'll see that I interviewed differently when I was, say, 18 than when I was 24, and differently in my 40s than I when I was 25. So it really is like a lifelong voyage of learning about questions and reactions. It was only when I started to think back on that first letter did I realize okay, this is – I guess it would sort of be like being a basketball player and you know that you're born with big hands.

If I go up for a dunk, I can grip the ball with one hand. Carmelo Anthony can't. It's like a big secret. He can't get his hands around the basketball. He's great but some people are just born with big hands and some people don't have big hands. I'm only now starting to realize okay, I was kind of born to do this.

Tim Ferriss: Did your parents facilitate that and cultivate that in any way? Or was it the nature more than nurture in the household?

Cal Fussman: It's a good question, and maybe they did in that my dad loved sports. I grew up in the 60s at a time where Mohammed Ali came

into play. He was my childhood hero. In some sense, that was the start of it. Because he was more than my hero just because he was the heavyweight champ of the world and he could dance and make sure nobody ever hit him. And then when he wanted to hit you, he could hit you 16 times before you even blinked.

It was more than the fact that he could make predictions with poetry and make you always laugh. His actions made you ask questions. He would take his Olympic gold medal and throw it in the Ohio River, and it would make you wonder, hold it; how is it that a black guy can win a gold medal in Australia and come back after representing his country and not be able to sit at a lunchroom counter at a Woolworth's next to white people. He would defy the government and refuse draft induction, wouldn't go in the Army. And basically say: hey, I ain't got nothing against no Vietcong. And he would make you think: hey, what is going on over there in Vietnam?

So that was a huge, huge part of my childhood.

Tim Ferriss: Did you have any particular career aspirations? What did you want to be when you were a kid, say from second grade onward? Were there any particular professions that you knew you wanted to go after?

Cal Fussman: Two things. I wanted to see my face over a column in a big city newspaper, and I wanted to write a magazine story about Mohammed Ali.

Tim Ferriss: Wow, very prescient.

Cal Fussman: No, I knew what I wanted to do. Only later, after I'd done it so quickly, did I realize: oh, what am I gonna do now? Which we can get to.

Tim Ferriss: You mentioned 18 and 24, so two very specific ages. Take me to, say, 18 and then 24 and contrast your two styles. But if you could tell us where you were at those two points, also.

Cal Fussman: Sure. When I grew up, I grew up thinking an interview was *Meet the Press*. I grew up thinking it was what happened in the locker room after a sporting event. So I knew in order to achieve my dreams, I needed to go to journalism school. I asked around and found out University of Missouri had one of the best, so that's where I went. I learned to ask who, what, when, where, and why and went through the whole journalism cycle.

This was also an interesting time. It was the time of Watergate. So journalists were seen at the highest point that maybe they've ever been. It was really cool to be a journalist. A journalist actually brought down the president when they caught him lying. So it was a great time and I went into sports. So basically after I graduated, four months after I graduated, I was sitting ringside when Mohammed Ali won the heavyweight championship for the third time. A year after that, if you lived in St. Louis and you opened the *Post Dispatch* sports section, you saw my face over a column.

And a year after that, I went to the big time, New York. An amazing magazine called *Inside Sports* got started up.

Tim Ferriss: How old were you at the time?

Cal Fussman: I was 22 by then. Basically, this magazine was really unique. It was set up in the day that *Sports Illustrated* was as big as it gets, and it was set up to compete with *Sports Illustrated*. And it brought in all these great writers. So I'd be going to the bar at night and sitting next to Hunter Thompson, the Gonzo journalist who'd be throwing back shots. The next morning I'd be getting up and going on a plane to Pittsburg.

Tim Ferriss: Wait, hold on one second. You did shots with Hunter S. Thompson?

Cal Fussman: Oh, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: Okay, we're going to come back to that. Please continue.

Cal Fussman: This magazine attracted all these writers. The guy who started it was a guy named John A. Walsh, who went on to start *Sports Center* for ESPN. He had one of the most amazing things I'd ever seen at the time. I didn't really even know what a Rolodex was. I walked into *Inside Sports* for the first time. It was a Friday afternoon. I called him up and I said: hey, if I come into New York to work, I'm not asking you for a job, just make sure I don't starve. And he said: come on in!

I showed up at the office at like 4:00, and there were two guys with a dolly stacked with beer. It was case after case of beer. I got in the elevator right behind the dolly. They hit the same floor number that I needed to go to, and they just rolled it out into the offices of *Inside Sports*. And I said, this is where I need to be. This magazine attracted guys like David Halberstam, who is a Pulitzer Prize

winning writer, just the best of the best. Basically, I got to sit next to all of them.

I was only a kid; I was 22. Every night everybody would go across the street to a bar called The Cowboy. Tony the bartender was behind the bar. At the time, I had no money so they would put out these little hors d'oeuvres. That was where my dinner would be if the guys with expense accounts weren't going out later.

Tim Ferriss: The mixed nuts and olives.

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Cal Fussman: That was dinner.

Tim Ferriss: Crappy maraschino cherries.

Cal Fussman: But it was great because you're sitting next to Frank Deford, who was the big sports writer of his day. A guy named Gary Smith came to work there; he was a national magazine award winner for many, many years. And it was just a blast. It was the best time.

Tim Ferriss: It sounds incredible.

Cal Fussman: And then, like a lot of artistic successes, it was not a commercial success. And like a lot of startups, it went belly up.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like the Paris Review and many, many others.

Cal Fussman: There you go. So here I am in New York, and basically I've now achieved everything I'd set out to achieve when I was a kid. And I'm looking around saying, what am I gonna do now? Where am I gonna go? I had no idea. Because I knew if I took – Inside Sports was not a job, it was an experience. It was an event every evening. Who's coming tonight?

I didn't know what to do so I called up my mom and dad. And I said: you know, I think I'm going to take some time off and travel. and my mom, who's always really supportive, said: oh, Cal, that's wonderful. And little did she know when I said it that I wasn't coming back for ten years. But I didn't know it, either. I just bought a ticket to go over to Europe, left with a few guys, and that started a ten-year odyssey of Cal going around the world.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, God. Let's hit pause for a second. I want to do some backtracking here. The first question, and I have not forgotten

about Hunter S. Thompson, but when you said – and please correct me if I'm getting this wrong but I don't need a job; I just don't want to starve. And he said come on in. Why did he give you such a warm welcome?

Cal Fussman: He had actually reached out to me. And again, this went back to University of Missouri journalism. That's where he had gone to school. I found all through my travels this school and its network, I was always linked to them in some way. And you knew who was really good from that school; everybody knew it. So if I found out that somebody was doing really good work, and they were an editor and I knew they went to the University of Missouri, it's an easy phone call for me to make.

It's interesting because I didn't have to make those calls often because there was like a nexus of people who bumped into people and you were ferreted to the right place. So when Inside Sports folded, ultimately one of the editors there got the job at the Washington Post Sunday Magazine. But when I was traveling around the world, I didn't really write.

Tim Ferriss: I have so many questions about the travel. The preceding contrast, so if we looked at, say, how you interviewed and asked questions when you were at the tail end of your first professional gig, and then at the tail end of Inside Sports; what changed?

Cal Fussman: Nothing really changed there. Basically, the idea was to get the information you needed for a story, to fill out a story. Back in that day, I know it's hard for sports writers to believe it because they ask me to speak at colleges in front of journalism schools and in the '70s, women's sports got no coverage at all. They would beg you to go to their games, go into their locker rooms, whatever you wanted.

I was talking at the University of Nebraska Journalism School. They can't even interview women's volleyball players in a very relaxed fashion. They have to go through the Sports Information Office, and they won't be able to ask personal questions. So it's a completely different time. When I would go out to do a story, I might spend a week, two weeks with somebody. And now, that just doesn't happen because of all the proliferation of the media and everybody's asking for that time so it's pretty much shut down.

So basically you got to hang with people. The questions basically filled out the story. But for me, it was very different than the next stage because that first stage was very who, what, where, when,

and why and what might have been underneath; what was your childhood like. And it filled out a sports story. The next step that started when I was about 23 or 24 was completely different.

Tim Ferriss: And that was, just to place it in the timeline, that was before you left?

Cal Fussman: No, this was the moment I left. Inside Sports shut down and there was actually like a run on the bank to go over, people to get their last checks.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds pretty common.

Cal Fussman: Right after that was when I decided to start traveling. And that's where interviewing changed for me forever.

Tim Ferriss: Two quick questions before we get there. First is what was it like doing shots and having drinks with Hunter S. Thompson?

Cal Fussman: It was fantastic. He was a very funny guy, and it was all anecdotes. There were a bunch of people in the bar, everybody was telling stories. It was completely natural. What's kind of interesting about my memory of it is later on, I interviewed Johnny Depp, who played Hunter Thompson. And he just reached into this vegetable plate that was in front of the hotel.

Tim Ferriss: Are you talking about Depp?

Cal Fussman: Yeah, Depp. And he pulled out a carrot and put it in his mouth the way Hunter Thompson would smoke those long cigarettes, and he became Hunter S. Thompson. It was wild. He said: yeah, it comes out in me every now and then. The thing about Hunter S. Thompson is you think about him almost as a caricature. But like at the bar, he was a regular guy just telling stories. I remember him telling stories about being a bowling writer in San Juan, Puerto Rico.

And we'd be laughing about things like that. So it was very human. The conversation wasn't with the caricature of Hunter Thompson, it was with the guy.

Tim Ferriss: When you went out to drink with the guys, hopefully with the expense accounts, what was your drink of choice? Did you have a go-to drink?

Cal Fussman: Back then, it was before I knew anything about wine. Back then, it was Guinness or a Black and Tan, or maybe a gin and tonic. Those were the three things. You know, one time I remember – this is really crazy. You want to know why Inside Sports went out of business? They had one of the photographers who had worked with Sports Illustrated in the past. And so I was sent out on a story with this guy, and this guy was saying: oh, I gotta show you how to use an expense account. I can see you're a very young novice, here.

And before he'd do any work, he was straight to the bar. And I'm saying, are you sure? Like maybe we should go out and do interviews. No, no, no. He starts to say: you know, I think we need to have some green chartreuse.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, Lord.

Cal Fussman: This guy must have knocked the bar bill. And his point was: look, this is how we do it at Sports Illustrated. Like if you don't run up a bar bill like this, nobody's going to think you're big time.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas.

Cal Fussman: It was a little like that. It was all like this day to day event. I was meeting the athletes that I grew up watching on TV, and talking to these sports writers. It was one of those times that comes around once in a life and then when it's gone, you can never really have it again because part of it is you're naivety making it so grand. And then it was over. The magazine was dead. And oh, man, at the time I thought I've got another 50, 60 years to live; what am I gonna do?

Tim Ferriss: So how did you decide on travel?

Cal Fussman: I didn't know what to do. I had met, when I was in St. Louis, a woman from France. And she came from Monpazier and she says: oh, you have to come visit Monpazier and pick the grapes. So in my mind, I always thought I've got to get to Monpazier. So we bought tickets, I bought a cheap ticket through Iceland Air. They would land you in Iceland and then fly you into Luxembourg. And the idea, I guess, was to get you to somehow stay in Iceland.

Tim Ferriss: It is. They still sell it. It's like the stopover destination. Stay for a few days, please.

Cal Fussman: And you know what? People should because one of the Playboy centerfold photographers told me that that was one of the best places that he'd ever been to in terms of meeting women. He said it

was like outrageous. You'd go there on a Saturday night, and everybody knew everybody but by 4 in the morning, people were naked doing cartwheels on top of the bar. And like who would have thought of it, from Iceland?

Tim Ferriss: Iceland, it's a limited number of activities, depending on the time of the year. But I actually went to Iceland for the first time with my family to see the aurora borealis about two winters ago. Just glorious, fantastic, entirely mystical word defying experience. It really was fantastic. So that's maybe the other more brochure friendly side of Iceland. But yeah, a lot of booze. And elves. They like elves and gnomes, also. But booze.

Cal Fussman: That sounds like a magical moment in your life.

Tim Ferriss: It was. It was.

Cal Fussman: Did you have a notion of what it would be, and then did it top it by ten times?

Tim Ferriss: The back story, not to turn this into – well, I guess it is the Tim Ferriss show so here we are. But to digress into my own stuff for a minute, my mom had always talked about wanting to see the Northern Lights before she passed on. This came up many, many times. And eventually, I was like fuck it, why haven't we gone to see the Northern Lights? Let's figure it out and that's how the trip came about.

And in my mind, of course, the image was informed by the photos that I had seen. It turns out that the colors that are captured by all of the photographs or equity that I've seen, are very different when you see the phenomenon in real life with your own eyes. It's just the most ghostly, fantastic – meaning phantasm-like experience that I've ever had visually without aid of plants. We really just got the Willy Wonka golden ticket.

Because we showed up, and we were there for I want to say ten days, which is important because you could have a few days of cloud cover. And if you're only there for a night or two nights, you could go all the way out into the middle of nowhere in Iceland or Norway, for that matter, or other places, and never see it. But we saw it, I want to say, seven out of ten nights. It was unbelievable. So it exceed all expectations. It was really a trip to remember.

Cal Fussman: I've just got to ask you one more question.

Tim Ferriss: Please, no.

Cal Fussman: What did your mom's face look like when she got the view that she wanted to have?

Tim Ferriss: A kid in the candy store, or the description that came to mind first was like a baby who opens their eyes and sees their favorite mobile above them; like just that completely dazzled look where there's nothing else in the world that exists for them in that moment but just the pure joy of that experience. It was great. One of the most gratifying things for me, certainly, that I've ever done for my family, which makes me feel like a bad son for saying...

Cal Fussman: Why?

Tim Ferriss: Because it took me that long. It was a great experience. I will say, for those people who are listening who are thinking about it, when I say there are very limited activities, I really mean it, in Iceland. We stayed at this place called Hotel – I think they pronounce it Rangald but it's Ranga, R-A-N-G-A, which is in the middle of nowhere. And if you do go, two things to note. It's dark all the time, and number two, there are activities that you can pay for but they tend to be on the expensive side.

So you can take a helicopter over live volcanoes, which actually was phenomenon. Or you can go snowmobiling, etc. but they all tend to be on the pricey side. So you do need to check your budget before you sign up for something like that. Yeah, it was glorious. But... so Iceland. So you got a cheap ticket on Iceland Air.

Cal Fussman: Cheap ticket on Iceland Air and landed in Luxembourg. And I was with a bunch of friends.

Tim Ferriss: How many friends?

Cal Fussman: Let's see. Very interesting. I mentioned one, his name was Gary Smith. But for these purposes, I'm just going to say there was a friend who was very skinny...

Tim Ferriss: I can't wait to see where this is going.

Cal Fussman: And a friend who was portly.

Tim Ferriss: Such an underused adjective, portly.

Cal Fussman: I am completely... These are my best friends, okay? The skinny guy, the portly guy. The skinny guy was just coming off a divorce and had basically felt like his whole life had been constricted in this box around Wilmington, Delaware, and wanted to go out and just see the world, see whatever was out there. And of course, my eyes were open to this because I didn't know what I was going to do or where I was going to go but I wanted to see the world, too. Monpazier, let's go pick the grapes!

And then the portly friend was a guy who was kind of like the mayor of his job, and the mayor of his city in terms of if you go to the bar in St. Louis, he's a fixture. Everybody loves him, knows him and the bar, the restaurant, everything is very kind of fixed.

Tim Ferriss: The mike was always his; he could hold court.

Cal Fussman: Holding court but even more than that. If you were in St. Louis, you knew if you went to Llewellyn's Bar at 8:30, you were going to see him. And accordingly, where he was going to have dinner; it was only one of a few places. If he wasn't at one, you can go to another. You know the book story; he walked into the place across the street where we got chocolates. So he lived on sort of a ritual.

So now, the three of us are let loose in Europe. Now, the portly guy's only got like ten days; he's on vacation from his job. The skinny guy who'd been working at Inside Sports with me, he's got some time, now. And I'm just kind of walking around with my eyes open wondering where this is all going to take me. So we end up in a mountainous town in Italy. It had two names because these countries would get involved in wars and then sometimes, wherever the winner was, they were named. I remember the German sounding name was Dorf Tirol. And it had a huge mountain.

And we found out that on this mountain, Ezra Pound the poet had lived in this castle. So the skinny guy is like all excited: oh, we gotta go see Ezra Pound's castle. So we took a hike up to this mountain. The portly guy's coming along, we're having a great time just talking and just breathtaking scenery. We get to this castle and we meet some people and they say: oh, if you would just keep going over this mountain, you will have an unforgettable experience.

There was a farmer there that is living – you literally will go back to the 18th century; that’s how this farmer is living. Just keep on going over the mountain, and just walk down this trail. Not many people go over the mountain but if you do, you will find this farm. He will put you up for the night.

Tim Ferriss: It sounds like the beginning of a dirty joke.

Cal Fussman: And so we start to get up to the top of the mountain. And now it’s getting darker and darker and darker. Maybe it’s 8:00, I don’t know what time it is but we’ve reached the peak, and now we almost can’t even see where we’re walking. But the skinny guy knows if we get down this mountain, we’re going to have an experience like no other and that’s what he was wired to do. And the portly guy’s saying: hey, fettuccine is being served down in the restaurant.

They both look at me and say, okay, what are we doing? What do you think I did?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, this is a toughie. I want to say that you went for the village but by the very fact that you asked me...

Cal Fussman: What would you do? And you love both of these guys, and you know that one guy really wants to go over the mountain; the other guy really wants the fettuccine.

Tim Ferriss: I say you can always get fettuccine; it’s not going away. But easy to say as the armchair listener of stories, as is the case right now. What did you do?

Cal Fussman: Well, I looked at them both and I just realized, look, if something were to happen by going down, I’m gonna regret it. And I knew in that moment, you know what? There’s gonna be a lot of those moments. That was the moment I knew I’m going over the mountain. Not tonight. I want to make sure my portly friend is taken care of, he eats his fettuccine. In a few days he’s getting on a plane, he’s going to go back home. But after that, I’m going over the mountain. And that’s what set off the trip.

It became completely addictive because I woke up every morning not knowing what was going to happen. And then, you asked before, where does the interviewing shift? So what happened was I had hardly any money. I would go to a bust station or a train station, and I would just walk up and say where’s the next train leave out of, or where’s it headed? And they would say a name and

I'd say okay, I want a ticket. So I would buy the ticket. Destination had no meaning to me whatsoever.

What had meaning to me was I'd never been there before and I'm going to take this trip down the aisle. The trip down the aisle was where all the stakes were. Because as I'm going down that aisle, I've got to look for an empty seat next to somebody who seems interesting. Somebody I can trust, somebody who might be able to trust me. And the stakes are high because I know that at the end of that ride, wherever it was going, that person had to invite me to their home. Because I had no money to spend night after night in a hotel.

Tim Ferriss: I was going to ask you how you paid for the trip. So it was just savings based until it was extinguished?

Cal Fussman: Well, there was very little money. I'm trying to let you know the stakes that were involved when I got on that train.

Tim Ferriss: They were very high.

Cal Fussman: It was like an athletic event where you're going out and you had to get a roof over your head that night. I'll tell you how seriously I took this, and I'm going to tell you a story after this which shows you what I learned. I'm walking down that aisle and I see an empty seat next to a beautiful woman. I look at her hands; no rings. She's looking at me. She's smiling at me. She could be a super model. I swear I walked right on by.

Tim Ferriss: Why?

Cal Fussman: Because there was no way she was taking me home! There was no way she was taking me home. Now, nobody can see me but if you saw me, you would know. The super model was not taking me home.

Tim Ferriss: In fairness, Billy Joel got Christie Brinkley.

Cal Fussman: Christie Brinkley. That's right.

Tim Ferriss: No offense to Billy Joel, and I'm not comparing you to Billy Joel; I think you're a very handsome man, but just to say about how things happen.

Cal Fussman: I'll tell you a story about this, that I came to later regret that, alright? So it's years later, and I get set up working at Esquire,

where I do this *What I've Learned* column. And I get set up to do an interview with Petra Nemcova, the super model. I'm waiting; she's supposed to arrive at 8:00 or something and she's late. So I'm sitting there waiting for her, and then she sits down and we start talking.

We have this amazing conversation. People may not know but she was in Thailand when that tsunami hit, in a bungalow with her best friend who basically lost his life and she was swept away by the tsunami and narrowly survived. This is an amazing story. It took an hour and a half just to tell the tsunami story. She's telling me these great stories, and we're really hitting it off. And finally, and the interview is supposed to go for an hour and a half; we're at four hours. And it's not an interview anymore. I feel like completely connected to her, the way I would have been had I met her on a bus or a train.

And I said to her, I said: Petra, I'm going to tell you something, I apologize. And she said, what for? And I said, because all those years, those ten years I was travelling around the world, if the empty seat was next to you, I would have walked right on by you just because you were good looking. And she had a very amazing reaction. She grabbed me by the hand and squeezed my hand, and she said: well, don't worry Cal, tonight I sat next to you.

Which is very cool but it made me realize – and this is really – if you're a good guy who's a little scared to approach that woman, you should remember that story. Because they want to be treated normally. I was talking to another actress about this, and she really started riding me. She said: okay, so you don't take that seat and now some asshole takes it and I've gotta put up with that asshole for the next hour and a half; thank you very much, Cal.

Tim Ferriss: So you walked by this woman when you got on the train. You walked down the aisle, you choose survival and housing over the prospective romance.

Cal Fussman: Waked by the super model and I'm looking, looking down the car. Okay, that grandmother with no teeth eating the crackers out of her purse; there's the winner. So I walk up, sit down next to the grandma. Let's say we're in Hungary, and this happened in many cultures. But for the sake of the story – and this happened in Hungary. I sit down next to her and I'll ask her about goulash. Now, of course she can't speak English. My Hungarian at that point is hi, how are you, I need to go to the bathroom.

And some of the younger people on the train are watching me and Grandma try and talk to each other. And naturally, they come over and they start to translate. He wants to know what makes a great goulash. This grandma's chest just burst with pride. And now she's talking about her grandmother making goulash, her mom making goulash, all the ingredients that go into goulash, how they've got to be put together just the right way. And then she looks at all these young Hungarians and said: you know, I've been riding on this train for decades.

Not one of you has asked how I make my goulash. This American, he asked. You tell him he has to come to my house because I am going to prepare him goulash so he knows what it's like to eat goulash in Hungary. All the people on the train, they come along. Now I'm staying with Grandma. Not only does she invite the people on the train; all her neighbors, all her friends, her relatives. Now I'm at the table, a room full of people; they're all surrounding me. The goulash is in front of me. And I slowly lift it to my lips. I taste it. My eyes shut and I smile. And there's just a roar from this place. He loves Grandma's goulash! The party goes on for like four days.

And during the party, one of the neighbors says, have you ever tasted apricot brandy? Because nobody makes apricot brandy like my father. He lives a half an hour away. You've got to come to taste the apricot brandy. That weekend, we're tasting apricot brandy, having a great time; another party starts. Another neighbor comes over to me. Have you ever been to Kiskunhalas, the paprika capital of the world? You cannot leave Hungary without visiting Kiskunhalas. Now we're off to Kiskunhalas. I'm telling you, a single question about goulash could get me six weeks of lodging and meals, and that's how I got passed around the world.

Tim Ferriss: That's incredible.

Cal Fussman: Ten years. Ten years.

Tim Ferriss: So what else did you learn about asking questions or, if you want to tackle it a [inaudible] way, feel free to take it in any direction but what are some common mistakes that people make in asking people questions, whether it's on a train or otherwise? But feel free to tackle either.

Cal Fussman: You know what, that's a good question for a little later because that's what I discovered later on. At the time, and I'll bring it directly toward hiring people where questions are being asked of

job candidates like, what's your biggest weakness? Which they've already prepared two hours on how to answer that question. You're not going to get a spontaneous, good response to that.

Tim Ferriss: I work too hard. Sometimes I get accused of being too detail oriented. Got it.

Cal Fussman: You got it.

Tim Ferriss: Nailed it.

Cal Fussman: That is the wrong question. But we'll get to that. Because I wasn't there yet. I didn't even know what I was doing other than okay, you've got to figure out a way to make people trust you through your questions. And I no longer had to fill out a story. I didn't need a who, what, when, where, and why. It was just pure curiosity. And then it zoned into this basic fact: people want to talk about their lives.

And often, especially if you go to a small town somewhere, people may not be able to talk so much about their lives because everybody talks about everybody in these little towns, and everybody knows the gossip, everybody knows the feelings and you have to keep some things to yourself. But if this guy comes into your house and he's from 7,000 miles away, you can open up in ways and tell him things you would never tell people close by, knowing he's going to leave.

And keep in mind, there were no cell phones. There was no social media. There was no Facebook, there was no going on the internet and finding out what this person just told me. It was like a secret.

Tim Ferriss: It was a safe haven.

Cal Fussman: Yeah. I was completely safe with these people. Not only that, but I was a safe haven for a lot of women. Because if they were in a small town and they are meeting somebody from their small town, everybody's going to know about it. But if you meet this traveler, your eyes are going to be open to this new world, plus you can go over to the next town and have a meal and start talking and get to know each other. And you're kind of free of all the constrictions of where you live. And so in a way, I became handsome. You know?

It's like I can remember in college going into a bar in Colorado and like all the guys were 6 foot – I don't know what it was at night but everybody was like 6 foot 4 or taller, you know? And the

girls were over 6 foot, and I'm just kind of walking around, and I'm like much smaller. I just realized I don't fit in here. It's just a different... I'm not handsome here.

Tim Ferriss: It's like every Dutch or Swedish party I've ever been to. Similar feeling.

Cal Fussman: There you go. I'm traveling around, right, and I meet a 6 foot 2 Dutch girl. Want to share a room as we're traveling? Okay, fantastic. It was so easy because we were in a different place and once you're traveling, you're a much different person than you are when you're at home. People see you differently and they treat you differently.

Tim Ferriss: You see people differently, too.

Cal Fussman: Yes.

Tim Ferriss: Wouldn't you say, in a sense?

Cal Fussman: That's right.

Tim Ferriss: I don't recall who said this initially but people will travel to the other side of the world to pay attention to things that they routinely ignore at home.

Cal Fussman: Bingo, yeah.

Tim Ferriss: It seems like a modern day, or I should say a different manifestation of this is sitting down on an airplane next to someone. You can get people to open up, or they'll volunteer to open up in ways that they might not to other people because they assume, rightly in most cases, they're never going to see you again.

Cal Fussman: That's it, 100 percent. When you talk about seeing people differently, when you're waking up in the morning and you don't know what's going to happen, and then you meet somebody, the person becomes the most fascinating person in the world in that moment. And they feel that because you don't know their life, so you're starting to ask some questions. And they're getting this attention. I don't want to say you're making them into a rock star, but they're getting the same kind of attention, the questions that are coming: why did you do that?

What kind of friends do you have? What's this culture like here? And all of a sudden, they're feeling like they're in the spotlight and

it feels good. And for women, it feels great. And I'm sure if you're feeling boxed in and you meet somebody from afar, I wonder what it's like in America? Maybe he'll like me. Maybe he'll take me home with him. Maybe I can visit. And so all of these conversations are just filled with possibilities and potentials. It's beautiful.

Tim Ferriss: In both directions, too, I think. I remember just in some of my travels, you come across not just the natives but you meet other people who are traveling from distant lands and kind of finding their own way in the same way that you are. And you start to wonder, maybe I should visit Turkey. Maybe I should visit the paprika capital of Hungary. It's just sort of the endless possibilities when divorced from the routine of your life at home that are so exciting.

Cal Fussman: It's that and also, I remember that the skinny guy and I were in Yugoslavia. This was right before the Olympics in Sarajevo, and it was cold. I remember we looked at each other and just were like, it's too cold here. We didn't have winter clothing. I said to him: you know, there are camel races in Deus, Tunisia. And a day later, we were in Tunisia. We just got on a flight and flew to Tunisia and headed to Deus. We missed the races but the next thing you knew, we've got pictures of us in the middle of the Sahara Desert.

So there was just the possibility... Look, it's even more like that now. You've got the internet to help you connect with somebody. You can get on a plane and be in a different world.

Tim Ferriss: Sure, couch surfing; there are cost free options out there.

Cal Fussman: If couch surfing was here when I was going around the world, I don't know, I might...

Tim Ferriss: Still be going?

Cal Fussman: I might still be going. I'll tell you that it was the end of the trip that changed my style of interviewing again. If I could have been couch surfing, I can't even imagine the potential I would have had because from what I'm told, you get rated. It's sort of like Uber; you rate the driver?

Tim Ferriss: That's right.

Cal Fussman: So you rate the place you stay and they rate the guest. So basically, I'm coming in with all these stories to regale you from these

different parts of the world. I'd get A ratings and 5 star ratings across the board. And then everybody would want: come to my place; please come to my place. But there was none of that and every day I had to get on the train or the bus unless people were passing me around.

After awhile, it became easier and easier. Because it was: well, you know, I've got a cousin here. And then I get off the train and the cousin would be waiting for me. And a party would be waiting for me at his house when I got there. So really, it was like a ten-year party.

Tim Ferriss: I do want to get to the end of the trip and the impact on the interviewing. And I can't believe I haven't asked you this before, but how did you hone your ability to tell stories? Because you're very good at asking questions but that doesn't automatically make one good at telling stories.

Cal Fussman: Maybe part of that is the writing, because that's what I was doing. I would interview people and then I would have to put what I got down in a specific order or a non specific order in order to manipulate people into leaning closer: what's gonna happen, what's gonna happen?

Tim Ferriss: Meaning like an in media rest sort of in the middle of the action type of start to pull them in?

Cal Fussman: Yes, exactly. You started to pull them in and then wait, wait, wait a minute. Now you have to go back to the beginning. I suckered you in here. But then there are other, more complicated ways where you don't start that way in the beginning and you save it for the end, but you do it in a more nuanced way. It's almost like okay, I'm reading but something is...

Tim Ferriss: Can you give me an example? I'm so curious. Because for people who aren't writers, and I'm to going to lose track here but I haven't been to journalism school. But when I've taken some writing classes that talk about the lead, and at least for non fiction stuff you get a couple of statistics, you need a couple of quotes; like three people is a trend and then you sort of piece it together. Don't bury the lead, meaning bring this attention grabbing piece to the top, and so on. We talked briefly about the in media rest. What would be a more subtle way to approach an opener?

Cal Fussman: Okay. Just say you had a murder story, and you were operating by that principle in journalism like put it right at the top. And then

okay, this horrible thing happened; let's go back to the beginning and now you've got to add everything up to see why that moment happened. Another option is to start it in a very ordinary way with just a twist that tells you something's going to go on, here... I don't know and you just keep reeling them in slowly, just give a little more.

Oh, man. And then they met this person; what's going to happen now? And then, you save it until near the end of the story. Part of the problem is when you do that in a magazine, they'll give it away in the headline.

Tim Ferriss: I was going to ask about the headline.

Cal Fussman: Yeah. But you can still use that tactic of telling a story that slowly grabs you in and it just puts out a little bait and gives you that smell there's something interesting here. And then you're dragging the line so that they've got to keep following it. And they're feeling, you know what? Something big is behind here. And make them get to the end. And then if you can deliver, I don't want to say it's orgasmic but...

Tim Ferriss: It's funny; I was thinking of this sexual analogy. Instead of the wham, bam, thank you ma'am quick fix, it's like okay, I didn't think I needed some tantric sex and two hours of this, turns out it's pretty great. And then you get the pay off and you're like, you know what? That was totally worth it.

Cal Fussman: You've just named it. It's the tantric sex...

Tim Ferriss: The tantric structure.

Cal Fussman: ... story telling. That's it. Sting would love it; six hours.

Tim Ferriss: So at the end of your travels, what happened that affected you?

Cal Fussman: So I'm going around, I'm having a great time. After ten years, I got a pretty good network of people. So I don't really even have to rely on meeting somebody.

Tim Ferriss: Grandmothers eating saltines.

Cal Fussman: Because enough people know me and when you're in Brazil, oh, there's this [Speaking Foreign Language] farm where they grow the cocoa beans. And great couple, just go there; we'll send the

letter in advance and they'll be expecting you. So I am, at this point, it's almost like I'm a guest that's now expected.

Tim Ferriss: Part of the family.

Cal Fussman: Really, I'm part of the family before I even arrive. And a friend, the skinny guy, got married. And he decided to take a year and spend it in Cochabamba, Bolivia. So I hear that, and I'm thinking...

Tim Ferriss: I hope his wife to be knew that plan before signing up.

Cal Fussman: Oh, she did. And that was it. We don't have any kids; let's do something outrageous that nobody expected. And so naturally, I hear Cochabamba, Bolivia; hey, I was in Peru. Now, skinny guy is moving to Cochabamba; hey, I'll spend a few months in Cochabamba. So I'm there, and I get a call from the Washington Post Sunday Magazine. And again, going back to this nexus, the guy in charge had worked at Inside Sports and now he was in charge of his own magazine.

And he called me up and he said: you know what? We're doing an issue about great beaches around the world. We know you've been to Brazil before. Is there a story about a beach in Brazil that you could write up for us? At the time, I said look, I'm in Cochabamba, Bolivia. You would think it's crazy but I was really getting into Cochabamba, Bolivia. It's like a completely different culture, there's al de plano, it's a landlocked nation. You really are experiencing something different as a traveler.

But I said okay. I said: you know what, I actually heard of a beach in Brazil. You might not want me to go there because you're probably doing this as a travel issue to basically get travel agents and airlines so people can go to these destinations. This beach that I heard of is in the north of Brazil. From what I heard, you can't even get there unless you go on a crude sailing vessel and on mule back. And the editor is saying: you know, why don't you just check this place out? So I say okay, and I leave Cochabamba, I go to Brazil. I end up in a city called Fortaleza.

And just as I arrive, the first trip to this isolated beach, sand dunes that look like they're straight out of the Sahara abutted against the most sparkling waters of the Caribbean, the first tour bus is going to go to this place. There are going to be dune buggies; we don't have to go by mule, we don't need the crude sailing vessels and I'm just right on time.

And so first bus leaves at midnight, Friday night. I buy my ticket, get on the bus and I let down my guard. And I spoke to the beautiful woman on the bus on the way to the enchanted beach in Brazil, and that was the end of the trip. I would tell you the rest of the story, except it takes two hours to do. You're not doing it on tape but if [inaudible] any limits, we'll be out of there. The important thing about it was that was the moment where my style of interviewing had to change again because I was no longer traveling around the world.

The woman and I got married. We moved to New York, started to have kids and then I began to write for Esquire Magazine. And all the things that I'd learned on busses, trains, I was then able to project into Esquire's *What I've Learned* column, which consists of interviews with the most celebrated, accomplished and creative people on Earth.

Tim Ferriss: I have the handy recorder, the H4N on top of one of these, in fact. The *What I've Learned*, this is the third volume, is that right?

Cal Fussman: That's the third volume. These interviews have been done for almost 20 years, now with everybody from presidents to premiers to movie stars; basically people that you know. And the idea is for me to interview them and using their own words, show them in a light that you never really knew. So you think you know these people, and then you listen to their experiences and you say: whoa, I never knew that about Robert De Niro or Mikhail Gorbachev.

So that is where these conversations on the trains were so important. Because I did not approach these interviews with Woody Allen or Wolfgang Puck, George Clooney, as if I was a journalist. I approached them as if they were sitting on the train next to the empty seat and I just sat down next to them. That is where the evolution continued, until actually very recently; it was 20 years.

So it took me ten years that an interview as more than *Meet the Press*, but then another 20 to figure out that it was more than sitting down with George Clooney and having the time of my life. Because a crazy thing happened to me, caught me completely off guard and made me think about interviewing in a whole different way. And this was only very recently.

Tim Ferriss: Can you talk about that?

Cal Fussman: Oh, yeah. No, 100 percent.

Tim Ferriss: Can you mention that, just because you brought it up and then we'll dial back the clock?

Cal Fussman: Sure.

Tim Ferriss: Can I share something first, also? I've digested this entire thing with highlights and so on. There are notes on writer's block, Jody Foster's comment, one of my favorites just for folks: in the end, winning is sleeping better. I just love that; it's so good. Highlighted Woody Allen. It just goes on and on. So I love this entire copulation and encourage people to check it out. But what changed so recently?

Cal Fussman: I was asked to give a speech on a cruise. And I never, ever, went on cruises before. In fact, I've got to say it's almost laughable because there are certain people, they hear cruise and they turn up their nose. And I think I was one of those people. In fact, I had a friend who is a writer, and his wife wanted to go on a cruise. And she kept on pestering and pestering him. My wife finally said to him, why don't you take your wife on a cruise? And he said: because I draw the line.

And I said: oh, man, maybe I think about cruises that way. And then I was invited to speak on a cruise. But it was a special cruise. It was a cruise called Summit at Sea.

Tim Ferriss: Yep, done by the Summit Series guys.

Cal Fussman: Okay, so you know these folks. So basically, it's a cruise ship filled with 4,000 entrepreneurial minds. And that was wild to begin with because I had limited experiences with entrepreneurs. And then you put yourself on a ship with 4,000 entrepreneurs, your life is going to change.

Tim Ferriss: A lot of potential energy. It's like Ted plus Coachella plus infinite amounts of alcohol.

Cal Fussman: There you go. And you can't even get on an elevator without meeting somebody, somebody on the elevator is going to say, what's your name? I'm Michael. This is where I work, this is what I do. Who are you? I felt, at the end of three days, my head was really, it was like getting pumped up with helium; I was about to explode. It was an amazing experience. Like you're sitting down at dinner and the guy next to you says: oh, this is a rocket ship pump

building. You want to see? And he pulls out his phone and he shows you his rocket ship. This is like wild. It was like traveling around the world except the world came to you.

Tim Ferriss: I think Jane Goodall was there, also; it just goes on and on.

Cal Fussman: The world is coming to you and wanting to hear you and tell you what they're up to. So in three days at Summit t Sea, you literally can go around the world. I was totally unprepared for this. I was asked to give a speech called "Decoding the Art of the Interview." I'd never spoken before, didn't know what it was going to be like. But I have experience with Mikhail Gorbachev and Donald Trump and De Niro and Mohammed Ali later on in life.

They're good stories. I'd been telling these stories as I was traveling around on Saturday nights and people were always like: oh, tell Ali's story. So I knew, okay, I don't know how to give a speech but I can tell these stories. And so I go up, and here's the thing about it. There are 20 events going on at once. Generally, when you look at that *What I've Learned* column, I'm invisible. I don't write a single word; I just interview them, the subject, and then put it down in their own words.

So I'm not a guy who you would ever see on TV that you would really know; I'm invisible. So I'm thinking, yeah, there are people who know what I do and people in the know will come up and tell me hey, I respect what you do, in odd ways. But I'm figuring okay, I'm on this cruise ship; maybe 20 people are going to show up at best. And in fact, I had read *Pencils for Promise* by Adam Braun. He talked about giving – it might have been his first speech. And I guess he was expecting a crowd, and he had maybe six friends attending and only one person other than his six friends showed up.

And he went out and he gave this speech, and what he realized was you give the speech as if that one person is the entire audience. And it turned out that she was so enthused that she later went to work for his charity. So I went in prepared. That book prepared me. If there's on person I there, I don't care; I'm going to give that person the best. I'm not going to be disappointed. I'm just going to go out, tell my stories, give a few lessons, and let's see how it goes. Maybe the same day that I'm supposed to speak, they move my event. So now even in the program, you're going to the wrong place.

Tim Ferriss: you're going to the wrong place.

Cal Fussman: So now I'm thinking okay, I'm down to like ten people. That's cool. I'll speak to the one. The time for the speech comes. People start filing in. I had set up this speech around wine, and there's a reason for it because in one of the stories – we can get to it a little later – I went out to learn about wine by becoming the sommelier at Windows of the World at the top of the World Trade Center right before the planes hit it. So I'm very attached to wine, and what I wanted to do was to have everybody drinking a glass of wine while I told these stories. So if I messed up, they were still [inaudible] –

[Crosstalk]

Tim Ferriss: Helps with reality bending, also.

Cal Fussman: That's right. We set it up so that all the wine is there ready to be served to people as they come in.

Tim Ferriss: But budgeting for ten people?

Cal Fussman: No, I said okay, there are 150 seats. If 150 people show up, fine; have the glasses and the wine but let's face it, you may only go through a bottle. So they were all prepared. The place seated 150; it was this funky nightclub. And all of a sudden the time starts to roll around, and I'm watching and people are just flooding in. They take up all the seats. I was very specific to the people serving the wine. I set up this speech to have toasts throughout to keep everybody's involvement going. So everybody had to lift their glass and scream with me.

It was to keep everyone engaged. So I said to the people delivering the wine: look, I need you to be able to walk down this corridor down the center and keep everybody's glasses filled because it's bad luck to toast with an empty glass. And so we're all set, and now every seat's taken and there are still like ten minutes before the speech is set to start and people are still coming in. And now they're coming down the aisle and they're sitting at my ankles. And they're filling the aisle, they're sitting cross legged in the aisle.

Tim Ferriss: You're sitting behind the bar.

Cal Fussman: That's right.

Tim Ferriss: Taking up the foot space.

Cal Fussman: To the back, the complete back and now there's a line of people out that can't get in. I've become like the hottest nightclub in New York City and I've never done this before.

Tim Ferriss: Not to derail this, but what do you attribute that to?

Cal Fussman: I think what happened is we...

Tim Ferriss: They switched you with Richard Branson in the program? I'm just messing with you.

Cal Fussman: No, that's good. I'll have to work on that next time. I think what happened was we titled it "Decoding the Art of the Interview with Mikhail Gorbachev, Robert De Niro and Donald Trump." And naturally, it said Cal Fussman has interviewed these people but people came in wondering what's it like to interview Gorbachev, or De Niro, or Donald Trump?

Tim Ferriss: And we'll definitely dig into some of that.

Cal Fussman: Okay. And so I'm watching all these people flood in, and now the aisle is completely cluttered. I can't get wine to people. Now I'm starting to freak out because I don't want people toasting with an empty glass. The back of the room is getting jammed packed. And so I just said, well, just go out and give your speech. So the speech, it lasts for about an hour. It gets a really good response. But what was surprising about it was afterwards, there was this long line of people to see me, and they're business people. The first couple came up, two women.

They say okay, you taught us about asking questions. We've got a problem. We are really passionate about our business. We can't seem to find people to work for us that are just as passionate as we are. What can we do? What can we ask? I said oh, that's easy; just tell them the Dr. Dre story. Dr. Dre story? Yeah. I said I was interviewing Dr. Dre and I said to him, what's the longest you've gone, working on a passion project without sleep? And he said: oh, man, when I'm working on something I really care about, I'm in the zone. I don't think about sleep; it's just I go until it's done. Could be 72 hours.

So I said: just tell the person you're interviewing, Dr. Dre, he goes 72 hours. What's the longest you've ever gone on a passion project

without sleep? You'll be able to tell something about that person by their answer. And look, they may tell you, you know what, I get eight hours of sleep every night because I come to work every morning fully charged. And you're going to know, hey, maybe that's the right person for a certain job in your company that's not going to be the most completely passionate person, but maybe they're the person that's got to do something nuts and bolts.

Tim Ferriss: Right, the CFO or the guy who interacts with Wall Street.

Cal Fussman: Exactly.

Tim Ferriss: Or gal, in fairness.

Cal Fussman: Yeah. And so you will find out through that answer something that's going to help you make a decision. And you could tell they're looking at okay, that's your question; we'll tell them the Dr. Dre story. And then people started coming up to me, like running successful businesses who had to hire a lot of people all at once because the business is doing really well. And you could tell they were nervous. Because all of a sudden a business that starts with an idea and only them is now taking on 1,000 people in a year.

How are you sure that those 1,000 people have what you had when you started the company, that essence? Because if they don't have it, the essence of the company is no longer what you wanted. And guys like that, and women, are coming up and saying: you know, next time you're in San Francisco, can we get together? Because I can tell there's obviously an issue with hiring. It's funny because now I'm starting to ask everybody about it and I'm really becoming very conscious that this is like an issue that's really important to a lot of people.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, it's the challenge. We were chatting before we started recording about Silicon Valley and some of the issues surrounding attracting and retaining top talent. It's the fundamental challenge for a lot of these startups in particular, when you go from perhaps hiring – say if you bootstrapped for a period of a time, ten people in a year to hiring ten people a day or a week. It's a massive challenge, putting together a process for that. A question for you about the presentation. If we were to try to decode decoding the art of the interview, is that the name?

Cal Fussman: Decoding the Art of the Interview.

Tim Ferriss: If we were going to try to meta that and decode the presentation itself, what story or stories – and I don't think I've heard any of them, for that matter yet, did people seem to respond best to? There's one that I have tucked in the back of my mind because when Alex, a mutual friend of ours, asked me if I had heard this story and I said no, he was just – I'm not going to say disgusted but just speechless at how I had not managed to hear this yet. But what did people respond to best in terms of stories?

Cal Fussman: Interesting. Different people respond differently to the different stories. If I was deconstructing the speech, one of the things that I wanted to do was to explain how much you can do with a single question in a short amount of time. To back that up, I told a story about my meeting with Mikhail Gorbachev. So I'll take you back to, say, 2008. I think it was February. We're in New Orleans and I'm in a hotel lobby. I'm all set to interview Mikhail Gorbachev for Esquire's *What I've Learned* column. We've got an hour and a half. Fully prepared, ready to go, couldn't have been happier.

And I get a call. I pick up the phone. Hi, Cal. It's the publicist. Sorry I have to pass this on but the interview with Mr. Gorbachev is going to have to be cut short. And now I'm thinking oh, man, is it going to be down to an hour? Because that's the thing. With this *What I've Learned* column, I can't fluff it up, I can't fill it out; I can't use my words. They have to be Mikhail Gorbachev's words and they have to be wise words. I need, at the very least, an hour to move into his soul in a way that makes him feel comfortable and extract that wisdom.

At the very least, 45 minutes. So I say to her okay, okay, how much time do I have? Ten minutes. Ten minutes? I don't want to say you are nuts but that's impossible. I can't do this interview in ten minutes. Cal, look, I understand but a lot of very important people have been added to the list to see Mr. Gorbachev. There's nothing we can do about this. Do you want the ten minutes or not? What am I going to do, say no? Okay, I'll take the ten minutes.

So I'm sitting down and the more I'm thinking about this, the worse it's getting because number one, I'm knowing that all of my questions are going to be translated into Russian, and all of his answers are going to be translated back into English.

Tim Ferriss: So you actually have five minutes.

Cal Fussman: Yeah. We're moving down. Plus, you're going to sit down, you're going to exchange pleasantries; it's not going to start in a finger snap.

Tim Ferriss: You have two and a half minutes.

Cal Fussman: Yeah, exactly. It wasn't two minutes but it wasn't much more. And so the publicist leads me into the room, and at this point I'm thinking okay, if it's two and a half minutes, just do your best. I look up and there he is, Gorby. And he's a little older than I remember; he's about 77 at the time. He was in town to speak about nuclear weapons and why they should be abolished. And we sit down, and I'm looking at him and I just know, just know he's expecting my first question to be about nuclear arms, world politics, Paris troika, Ronald Regan. He's just ready.

So I looked at him and I said: what's the best lesson your father ever taught you? And he is surprised, pleasantly surprised. He looks up and he doesn't answer. He's like thinking about this. It's as if, after a little while, he's seeing on the ceiling this movie of his past. And he starts to tell me this story. And it's a story about the day his dad was called to go fight in World War II. See, Gorbachev lived on a farm and it was a long distance between this farm and the town where Gorbachev's dad had to join the other men to go off to war.

And so the whole family took this trip with the dad to this town to wish him well as he went off. And Gorbachev is talking about this trip and he's providing these intricate details, and I'm transfixed but I'm saying oh, my God, I asked the worst possible question. This interview is going to be over and he's not even get to telling it.

Finally they do get to town, and Gorbachev's dad takes the family into this little shop and he gets ice cream for everybody. And Gorbachev starts describing this ice cream and the cup that it was in, this aluminum cup. And as he's telling me, it's almost like he's got his hand out in front of him and the cup's in it. It's that vivid to him. And it's as if in this moment, we both have this same realization: that cup of ice cream is the reason that he was able to make peace with Ronald Regan and end the Cold War.

Because that cup of ice cream, just the memory of it, is the memory of what it felt like for his dad to go off to war, for him to see his dad going off to war. That cup of ice cream in the memory was the dread that he knew of the possibility of never seeing his

father again. We're looking at each other like oh, man, this is deep. He didn't expect it any more than I did. Just at that moment, knock on the door. It's the publicist. The publicist comes in, very efficient. Mr. Gorbachev, Cal, the time for the interview is up.

And he looks at her and he wags his finger and he says no, I want to talk to him. Publicist puts up her hands, yes sir, and she backs out sheepishly. The door shuts, conversation continues. Now we're getting deeper. Ten minutes later, another knock on the door. This time, the publicist comes in a little slower. Mr. Gorbachev, Cal, and Gorbachev says, no, I want to talk to him. She backs out. Ten minutes later, knock on the door. This time she's in a panic.

Tim Ferriss: The train cars are just piling up.

Cal Fussman: Mr. Gorbachev, please, I've got the mayor of New Orleans right outside, there's a long line of people, we're way behind schedule. And Gorbachev just smiles. He didn't say anything but the look on his face was hey, what can I do, Cal? So I said thank you. I knew I'd pushed it to as long as it could be pushed. I left, and the interview was a success in that it had a little story like that and people could understand something about Gorbachev that they might never have known.

But for me, when I look back on it, what I realized was the power of the first question going straight to the heart and not the head. Because it was that question that went into his heart that took us to that very deep place and enabled the interview to continue to go. And because the interview could go, I was able to fill out the page for Esquire. Otherwise, that would have been it. There would have been no way the interview would have run.

So lesson number one, when people ask me what tips would I give, is aim for the heart not the head. Once you get the heart, you can go to the head. Once you get the heart and the head, then you'll have a pathway to the soul. And so basically, the speech was lessons tied to stories that backed them up. Whether it was with Gorbachev or Donald Trump, or Robert De Niro or Mohammed Ali, each story allowed the listener to understand something very basic.

Tim Ferriss: I'm going to pick a name that we haven't heard yet, just because this is the one that made Alex dance around because that's all he could do to respond before he insisted that I ask you about it. So Julio Caesar Chavez.

Cal Fussman: That's another story. It goes back to a time when I was a teenager. Again, as I started out, you knew that my childhood hero was Mohammed Ali, and so I followed boxing. Naturally, I wanted to fight. Where I lived, there were no boxing gyms around. What we had in New York was a tournament called the Golden Gloves.

Tim Ferriss: Golden Gloves, big deal.

Cal Fussman: Yeah, sponsored by the *Daily News*. The final sold out Madison Square Garden every year. I had no idea how to fight and I wanted to do it. So basically, a month before the Golden Gloves started, I showed up at a gym that was a few towns over in a bad neighborhood and said I want to train for the Golden Gloves. You had to be 16; I had just turned 16. I entered. This manager pulled me aside and said no, that's not the way it works; you don't know how to fight.

You don't know anything about fighting. What you do is you come here every night and we'll teach you. Within a year, we can put you in with people who have your experience and you'll learn, and then a year from now, you'll have some experience and you can go into the Golden Gloves. If you're good, you'll do okay. I said no, no, you don't understand. I came to fight.

Tim Ferriss: Thanks pops, but listen.

Cal Fussman: That's right. And basically, I wasn't on the tall side so I was a short guy with very short arms. My style was basically hey man, I'm just gonna rush across the ring and I'm just gonna start throwing punches.

Tim Ferriss: Joe Frazier style.

Cal Fussman: That's right. And you'll see what happens. Because like Joe Frazier knew how to fight.

Tim Ferriss: Right.

Cal Fussman: All I could do was just throw reckless, wild, crazy punches one after another. I was in good shape so I could throw punches three minutes a round, just start to finish. It was actually, for the people in the gym, it was kind of comical to watch because everybody knew think about when I finally got in the ring, one of two things was going to happen. Maybe I'd be able to just simply overwhelm whoever was in the ring just by sheer virtue of, I'm coming at you to throw everything I've got and I'm not stopping.

Tim Ferriss: That Tasmanian Devil strategy.

Cal Fussman: That's right; you got it. A month passes or so, and it's time for my fight in Golden Gloves. There was somebody at this club that was going to represent me. I show up at the club; he was going to drive me into Queens, New York. I was living on Long Island at the time, and I was all set. So I show up for my manager to pick me up and he's not there.

Tim Ferriss: Left at the altar.

Cal Fussman: Right. Now I don't have a manager, I don't have a lift to get into this place. There are no cell phones. You're standing by a pay phone throwing in quarters, like who can help me? I've got to get to the fights. I've got to fight. And of course everybody in the school knows about this. So it's at a high school in Queens with a very large gym arena. It's like a Catholic school. I managed to get somebody to drive me down there and I arrived just in the nick of time.

But now, I'm all nervous just to get there. I'm able to check in. I wrap my hands, get my gloves on and out of nowhere comes my opponent in the dressing room. And in the most causal way possible, he just puts out his left hand and says, Jesus; that was his name. But you couldn't tell. Not only was there a scar down one side of his face to his lip, but you could just tell he had done this like 400 times before he was 8 years old.

Tim Ferriss: Right, this was like checking in for work.

Cal Fussman: That's right. It's complete. Now I'm starting to realize, uh-oh, this could be a predicament. I get somebody who I'd never met before to work my corner. And this guy has no idea of my style, no idea. He thinks okay, I know how to fight. So he says okay, kid, listen. We're going to go in the ring. I want you to just take it nice and easy, move around a little, show him the jab and let's see what happens. So we start to walk in the arena, and this is like mid '70s.

In fact, it's a few years before the Rocky movie came out, *The Great White Hope*. I'm like the only white fighter on this card, and 90 percent of the audience is all white, okay? So when I come in the ring, it's like the great white hope has finally arrived. People are standing, cheering, going nuts. I'm looking around and it's like

it's surreal. I've lost sense of where I'm at. In one ear I've got: okay, move around, jab. I've forgotten who I am.

We get to the ring go to the center, get the instructions and I am completely lost. I do not know what happened. All I remember was getting up. Actually, my eyes opening and seeing three fingers that were very blurry, and I'm hearing four, five, six. I get up and now I can kind of see clearly, and Jesus is coming at me. His right hand comes back, and it's right in front of me, right in front of me and the bell rings. So I go back to the corner, and now I'm pissed. Like what just happened to me? Get in there! Throw your punches! Just go at him!

And I'm sitting on the stool, the manager is saying something and I don't even hear what he's saying because all I'm hearing is myself just screaming at myself: throw punches! Remember who you are! In the meantime, the ref is coming over and he's saying: son, are you okay? Are you okay? I'm saying, of course I'm okay. I'm gonna kick his ass. I'm gonna come out and you're gonna see some punches! Next thing you know, the referee is waving his hands and stopping the fight. I didn't respond to him. I was out.

Tim Ferriss: So this dialogue that you were having with yourself, that was entirely internal?

Cal Fussman: That's right. I had no idea. No idea. The worst part of all of this is my dad is in the crowd, and he brought two of his childhood friends. So now, you can imagine what I'm hearing. any time there's a family reunion, any time this comes up, we need a funny story; it's like oh, remember Cal and the Golden Gloves. I'm hearing this again and again and again over the years.

And finally almost 20 years later, right after I meet the woman in Brazil, she moves to New York, we get married, and I'm watching the TV and Julio Cesar Chavez, the great Mexican champion, junior welterweight, 140 pounds. He was 85, 86 and 0 at that point. I'm watching him on TV as he's cornering an opponent. I've got a big bag of chips between my legs and at this point we're right after the marriage, I've put on a bunch of weight so I've got a beer belly.

I've got a beer in one hand, chips in the other, belly between them and I'm screaming at the TV: come on, finish him off! What are you doing? Finish him off, Julio! And my wife looks at me and says: hey, calm down; we've heard your boxing stories. Because that was the first thing, when my family met her, that they indoctrinated her. You know about Cal and the Golden Gloves,

don't you? So I look at her, I look at the TV, and it's clear what needs to be done, here because I've got to get my manhood back.

And I said to my wife: you know what? Do you see that guy on the TV? Julio Cesar Chavez? I'm gonna fight him. Naturally, my wife is like, you're crazy, forget it; we've heard the story. But now I know I have to do this to close this chapter of my life, no matter what.

Tim Ferriss: Now just to place it, so at the time you're writing for Esquire?

Cal Fussman: Actually, when we moved to New York, I was writing for a magazine called *GQ*. My editor at GQ was a guy named David Granger who later became the editor of Esquire and when he did, he brought me and a bunch of writers with him. So this all started at GQ. The day after my wife is laughing at me, I march into David Granger's office and I say: hey, you want to buy a story? I'm gonna go fight Julio Cesar Chavez. He says, what? I give him the background and he said alright, let me go in and check with my boss.

Tim Ferriss: Let me see what our insurance policy looks like.

Cal Fussman: That was the first thing: you're going to have to sign documents saying we're not responsible for this; this is all on you. I said, that's fine. I go down to the Times Square Gym on 42nd Street at the time and up these rickety, old, wooden steps. It was like something out of the past, like you could literally hear each foot that you put down and there's the drumbeat of the bags and you walk up there. And since I had followed boxing, I knew who people were and I just start looking around at the trainers. There was a guy I recognized. His name was Harold Weston and he had fought Tommy Hearn, the welterweight champion.

Tim Ferriss: Tommy Hearn was nasty.

Cal Fussman: Yeah. He had actually done pretty well. He was a very slick boxer. He wasn't that tall, and Tommy Hearn was like six-two, six-three; tremendous reach and unbelievable power in his hands. That fight went awhile. I know Tommy scored a TKO but Harold had done pretty well avoiding the punishment. So I went over to him and I said: hey, I'm gonna be fighting Julio Cesar Chavez; do you think you can train me? Now he's just like, what is this?

Tim Ferriss: Who sent you here? Looking for the hidden cameras.

Cal Fussman:

You got it. That's exactly it. He's going: this guy says he's gonna fight Julio Cesar Chavez. Everybody in the gym is like: are you a professional? No. Are you an amateur? Well, I have one fight in the Golden Gloves 20 years ago; it didn't turn out. And now, Harold's saying: okay, okay, you're really gonna do this, huh? I'll tell you what. You come back tomorrow, like 3:00 and we'll do a little workout and we'll see. So I come back the next day, and this guy, he just tortured me.

The whole point was: get out of here. You're not fighting Julio Cesar Chavez. You have no idea what it's like to be a boxer. Like, a little respect for the craft, here. After three hours, literally I was reduced to tears again and again and again, and I just kept going. I remember getting home to my apartment and I rang the doorbell. The door opened and I literally collapsed into my wife's arms. It's like she dragged me to the tub, had hot water going. She threw in some Epsom salts and I just laid in there for three hours, unable to move.

When I left the gym, everybody in the gym was placing bets whether I was going to come back the next day, and I did. That was the first moment where... hey, that's interesting. And he said okay, I understand you're writing this for GQ. He was a fashionable guy so that lured him in, the style element. He said: so you're really gonna do this? I said: yeah, look, I'm just asking for one round with Julio Cesar Chavez. One round. That's it.

But I'm going out there and I'm giving it my all. He said: well, look, let me show you ways to get through that round. Now remember, he's a slick boxer. I'm gonna teach you how to move and you will survive. We can do this. If he's taking this really seriously, you're going down. But who knows? We don't know how he's going to react. Maybe he'll be curious and I will teach you how to move around the ring and protect yourself so that you don't die. In my mind, I'm also now thinking about the fight between Roberto Duran and Sugar Ray Leonard. I don't know if you remember; it was the second fight.

Tim Ferriss:

No mas.

Cal Fussman:

No mas, that's right. Where in the middle of the fight, we don't know what really happened; it's never fully been explained. In the first fight they had, Duran won by a decision in Montreal and afterward, he went back to Panama as a national hero, 50,000 people waiting for him at the airport and he just had like a three month binge party and gained like 50 pounds. In the meantime

Leonard, after his first loss, went back home and was training the next day for the rematch.

o they set it up to have an immediate rematch six months later and after he had maybe two months left, Duran started to train. Now he had to take off 40 or 50 pounds. He was in no condition to do this but he dramatically lost the weight. We'll never know but he was overweight a few days before the fight. Now, whether he took Ex-lax or something to purge his system, or whether, after he made the weight, he went out and ate three steaks and a bunch of orange juice, we know that his stomach was not in the best of shape.

But we also don't know if, when he got in the ring, his stomach was bothering him or Leonard adopted a style that wouldn't allow Duran to hit him and basically broke Duran mentally. So we don't know if it was his stomach, or his mind, or both but midway in the fight, Duran basically just throws up his hands and says: no mas.

Tim Ferriss: No more.

Cal Fussman: No more. Leonard celebrates and everybody watching was in disbelief because for 20 years, Roberto Duran had been the epitome of the macho man. He was like Mike Tyson of the lightweights in his era. He just bored straight ahead, nothing could stop this guy; he was relentless. And to see him quit was like what I felt about my experience in the Golden Gloves.

So I basically had to somehow eradicate all that feeling and I had to do it in a way that left me with some shred of pride at the end. So Harold says to me: okay, look. I'm gonna teach you how to move. And he was like a very classy fighter. And as he's showing me how to move around and avoid punches, I said: no Harold, no. That's not the way we're going to do this. No. The first time I got in trouble because I didn't go out throwing punches, and that's how I'm coming out this time.

I'm coming out to throw punches, and I want to do it just like Joe Frazier. Joe Frazier is a short guy, stocky arms, just bobbing, weaving, coming straight ahead. And Harold says: no, no, no I'm not going to do this. Because basically, now I'm asking Harold to teach me a style that is going to bring all of my energy, full focus, full bore, straight ahead, right at one of the most damaging punchers in history.

Tim Ferriss: Incoming missiles.

Cal Fussman: That's right. He's just fighting with me. There's no way; I'm not being a party to this. If we do this, we do it smart and you come out alive. You're not going in there like Joe Frazier.

Tim Ferriss: All due respect, you're not Smoking Cal.

Cal Fussman: That's right. I said no, I want you to teach me like Joe Frazier. And he said: okay. You want to be Smoking Joe? I can teach you how to be Smoking Joe. And he pulls out a rope and he sets it, from one – the top of the rope's on one side of the ring – to the other, and he makes me start, bobbing and weaving under this rope. Now, anybody who has never done this before, after a minute your thighs are burning and basically Harold's idea is I will make him do this so long that he comes to his senses and fights the way I tell him so I can protect him.

But no matter how much it burned, I just got down low and I just bobbed and weaved and moved my head. And then he'd take me to the bags, and now he's teaching me how to throw punches. Because I didn't know how to do any of this stuff. And then you have to get in the ring. And I'm 35 years old and all these kids are 19, 20. They love to get in the ring because they want to beat the crap out of me.

Believe me, they were because I did not know how to fight. But every day, I just kept on going back. I literally trained like a fighter. It must have been four months. And plus, on the other hand, I had to figure out a way to get Julio Cesar Chavez in the ring with me. He had no idea of this.

Tim Ferriss: He had no idea that you were in this intensive training camp with no agreed upon fight.

Cal Fussman: Not a clue. He doesn't know that I exist, and I am training three hours every afternoon, plus running in the morning, plus calisthenics at night. I'm eating just the way Harold's telling me. My weight goes from 165; now I'm down to less than 147, closing in on 140. Chavez fights at 140. At this point, he's 87 and 0 with I don't know how many knockouts but I think it was in the 80s.

Tim Ferriss: Very high percentage.

Cal Fussman: Yes, very high percentage.

Tim Ferriss: I remember also, just as a side note because I was mystified and just captivated by Julio Cesar Chavez and at some point they

looked at x-rays of his head and his skull is like twice as thick as a normal human being.

Cal Fussman: That's right. So he was used to coming straight at people and absorbing whatever punishment they were dishing out in order to land his shots. And believe me, when Harold heard that I was doing this, he said: look, Cal. I know a guy who fought Julio Cesar Chavez. His name is Juan Laporte. Basically, after that fight, Laporte was pissing blood for a long time because one of Chavez's biggest shots was this left hook to the liver. And he's saying: you don't understand. This is a professional athlete at the top of his profession.

You know, a lot of guys think, oh, if I was out on that football field, I would have made that catch. They see a professional drop the ball; I would have brought that in. And lots of times, they drop passes that the rest of us might have caught. But you don't understand what it's like to be up against a professional athlete until you are. Because even these amateur kids were knocking my head off every day. But I just kept coming back up them steps, kept on coming back up them steps.

Finally, a friend of mine, the skinny guy, writing for Sports Illustrated had been sent to do a story about Julio Cesar Chavez. So while he's out interviewing Julio Cesar Chavez, he says: oh by the way, I've got a friend who wants to fight you. Is it okay if he comes and fights you? Julio said sure, send him over. He only wants one round. Fine, fine; it'll be great. So now Julio has said yes.

Tim Ferriss: I'm just imagining it's like if your second grade self in a different era had written to Tiger Woods, being like, my friend in second grade wants to play you in golf. Like, sure. Yeah, why not? Send him over.

Cal Fussman: Julio is a fun loving guy. You know, maybe he saw it as a joke; I don't know. At this point, it's like months I've been training. Now you look at my body, I've got a six pack and now I'm getting in the ring and I was up against an amateur who was really beating me up badly in the beginning. And then one day he threw a right hand at my head and I ducked under it and I clocked him with a right hand. And he just went sprawling backward.

Now I'm starting to think: okay, Julio, are you ready? Are you ready for this? All the people in the gym are laughing. It's all part of a community where it's like, what is going to happen? At this

point, GQ meanwhile is funding this. They're funding all the training and they're going to fund my trip to Mexico. They've got to send photographers. They'll send my wife. Now I've got an entourage going down to Mexico to fight Julio Cesar Chavez.

And he's training to fight Pernell Whitaker. This is like the biggest fight in his life.

Tim Ferriss: I remember this.

Cal Fussman: He's actually not really training that hard. Like we see him. We're supposed to have our fight while he's in training, and I'm seeing that he's going to different towns and having parties so I'm starting to think...

Tim Ferriss: This is after you arrived?

Cal Fussman: This is after I arrived. I didn't know. I thought maybe he's normally like this. But something in my mind was saying if he's fighting Pernell Whitaker, he should be a little more focused than this. So I'm waiting for this appointed day and Harold Weston, my trainer, new the president of the World Boxing Council, Jose Sulaiman, who set up a weigh-in. GQ made me a robe. Julio was very amused by all of this. We went out running one morning and the thing about it was Julio trains in Toluca, Mexico; high altitude. So that was my first moment where I said, uh-oh.

Tim Ferriss: This might be an issue.

Cal Fussman: Yeah, because I trained really hard back in New York but all of a sudden at altitude, you're not the same. So we're running in the morning, and it comes to this day where okay, we're gonna do it. I show up, I've got my GQ robe on. But they invited kids from the neighborhood in to come witness this, and the kids thought oh, this is a fight. So Julio is set up, I'm set up and we're ready to go.

The one thing Julio said was: look, I can't wear 8 ounce gloves like you're going to wear because I'm scared I'm going to hurt my hands. So I'm just going to wear training gloves but other than that... And I said, no head gear. I said, this is a fight. I'm coming to fight you. So he just wanted to protect his hands. He had these white gloves, I wouldn't call them pillowy but there was cushion in there.

Tim Ferriss: What are they, 12 or 16 ounces?

Cal Fussman: Yeah, I don't know if they were 12 or 16 but they weren't 8 like mine. That was the only difference. Jose Sulaiman, President of WBC, asked the guy to ring the bell. And all of a sudden I go charging straight in the style of Joe Frazier, right at Julio Cesar Chavez. He looks at me and he's used to coming straight ahead. And now he's saying, whoa, what's going on?

Tim Ferriss: What the hell is this?

Cal Fussman: Now, here's the thing about this. Harold said to me: look, you don't understand how good he is, how quick he is. You have no chance of hitting him. Do you understand me? Like all the work you did, there's only one chance you have, and I'm gonna tell it to you. You listen to me, you listen to me good. This is the strategy. I want you to throw, just like I've been teaching you, a left jab, straight right hand, left hook. Okay? He's gonna catch those punches. Then I want you to do it again. Left jab, straight right hand, left hook. He's gonna catch those punches.

Then I want you to do it again. Left jab, right hand, left hook. And he's gonna catch them again. Then I want you to keep on doing that again, and again, and again. Do it 20 times. And then, on the 21st time, if you're still standing because we don't know, he may just hit you in the liver and that's the fight. If you're still standing, if you do that 20 times in a row and you're still there, go left hand, right hand, and then come back with another right hand.

And so the bell rings, and now he's circling around trying to figure out who is this lunatic coming at me like Joe Frazier, bobbing, weaving, snorting; I could sound like Joe Frazier. But he's so fast that just like Harold says, I throw the left hand, I throw the left jab, he catches it. I throw the right hand and he catches it. I throw the left hook, he catches it. The first time I did it, he said okay, I know what you've got. I'm just gonna see how much you can take in a little while, but we'll play this out; we'll play it out.

So I keep storming in, I keep throwing these three punches, He keeps catching them. He's moving me around but I keep throwing these three punches again and again and again. Finally, like two minutes into the round, I go left jab, right hand, and then you could almost see him lifting his hand to catch my left hook and I just throw the right hand and it just socks him in the jaw. And he looks at me and he sprawls backward as a way of saying okay, you caught me. Okay, okay, okay.

He goes back like he's staggered and then he smiles at me and says okay, now we're gonna fight. Now we're gonna fight. He comes in on me and he throws a left hook to my liver. I'm telling you, it was like someone took the pipe of a Hoover vacuum cleaner, attached the vacuum cleaner that was on full blast sucking up and just shoved it down my throat. Down to my stomach, and it's like my whole stomach is coming up through my mouth.

The thing about it was, I just started throwing punches back. It was his way of just saying I'm going to give you just a little taste, but now I'm firing back. Because as bad as I was hurt, this was my moment. I had to avenge what happened to me when I'm 16 years old and I'm firing back. Now he's starting to hit me. And so Jose Sulaiman, ding, ding, ding, ding. The round's over. I go back to my corner. My lips are blue. The altitude and that one shot literally took everything out of me. But in my mind, I did it. I'm here. I did it.

And Julio, he's training for his fight. He looks over at me and says, valtro? You want another? And I said, si, mas. And we did another one. And then in the second round, he was having fun but he was starting to attack me pretty good. And you could tell Jose Sulaiman is watching this and he's saying, a minute and a half into the round: ring the bell, ring the bell before –

Tim Ferriss: Before we have a Gringo casualty on our hands.

Cal Fussman: That's right. And so the bell rings, I go back to the corner, we embrace. He was really wonderful about it. Because what was cool about what he did was he treated me, now that I think about it, he treated me like the assistant to President Johnson treated me. He didn't laugh, he saw my punches coming, he saw what I could handle. And then when he saw that I had outfoxed him for a second, he said okay, I'll lift the game but I'm not here to level him.

And so it was a really wonderful experience. They had been teasing my wife, asking her how much insurance we had and stuff like that. But at the end, he really rose to a high level in the way he handled the whole thing. Because at the end of it, I walked out of it after going through everything I did, I pushed myself as far as I could go, I got hit in the liver and I came back. So now it's just a good story.

Tim Ferriss: When you spoke to your wife after the two rounds, later that night or whenever you actually had a chance to decompress and be by

yourselves, how did she describe what was going through her head as she watched you guys after the first bell ring?

Cal Fussman: I think she was pretty scared. I think she probably was watching with her hands over her eyes but with her fingers spread so that she could see. I think she was really proud. And you know, the thing about it is you realize it's not so much about winning and losing, although my kids, it's crazy because my kids hear the story and they tell their friends in junior high school or whatever and their friends are like, did he win? They have no concept.

But the thing is, I did win because I confronted myself. I had to go up those rickety steps every day. I had to get the crap beaten up out of me every day in order to learn how to duck a punch. And I did. I pushed myself as far as I could go. And now I get a great story out of it. When I talk about the Golden Gloves, it's just a funny part of the story; it's not something that eats at me anymore. I need that part of the story to set up the ending. So I'm thankful that happened to me because without that, without A, I wouldn't have done B which led to C.

Tim Ferriss: That's a healthy way to think about a lot of things, I suppose. People, even if they're not storytellers or writers, if they think about their mishaps or some of the challenges they've had, it's the part A they needed to set up part B.

Cal Fussman: You know what? It is a great way of looking at life. And man, I have taken a beating so many times. One of the great things about telling stories is when you realize that okay, this beating I just took, maybe I can use that to get an advance from a magazine to do something cool. And again and again, I use my mistakes, foibles, humiliating moments to come back and try to make some sense of them and triumph over those moments.

Again, you don't have to be perfect, you don't have to win but you have to look deep inside of yourself and know that okay, I respect myself for this. And to this day, I really do. It gets complicated when people look at the picture. I have a big picture at home of me hitting Julio. And people look at it and it looks real. It looks authentic.

Tim Ferriss: It is real.

Cal Fussman: It is real. But it lends people to say, what happened? What was the result? The result was I survived.

Tim Ferriss: So Cal, there are so many more stories that even if not on tape, I will have to ask you about but perhaps we'll do a round two. We have to talk at some point about Mohammed Ali. We have to talk about Trump, we have to talk about De Niro; there are so many other things. The James Beard Award, the list goes on and on but I know you have a dinner to get to. Do you have a little bit of time for some of my customary rapid fire questions?

Cal Fussman: I love those questions.

Tim Ferriss: Alright.

Cal Fussman: I hope I have rapid fire answers.

Tim Ferriss: They don't have to be. That's the whole twist on the phrasing of the rapid fire questions. The questions can be rapid fire but your answers can be as long as you would like them to be, or short.

Cal Fussman: I love these questions.

Tim Ferriss: Alright. The first that I usually start with is when you think of the word successful, who is the first person who comes to mind, and why?

Cal Fussman: You mentioned him during the course of this interview. There are two people. One is this kid Alex Benyan, who's 23 years old. He was in school at USC and his parents had basically raised him to be a doctor to the point where, during Halloween when he was a kid, they would dress him up in scrubs. Just get the point? That's where you're headed. He gets to college, and he's got a stack of biology books next to him and he just can't do it. He's really smart but he's just not linked to it.

And he starts to wonder, what am I doing here? He's going to school at USC, it's a great school. He starts to wonder about this word success. And he goes to the library and starts to look at biographies of people who he deemed to be successful, to see what the definition of success was. And he's reading biography after biography and he realizes that the book that I'm looking for doesn't exist. I need to go out and to interview these people to find out what they think success is. And so he did.

And on his journey, one of the people that he went to interview was Larry King. And he actually met Larry outside a Whole Foods. He saw Larry pushing his shopping cart and went running down the street: Larry King! Scared the bejesus out of Larry, and

asked if he could interview Larry, and Larry invited him to breakfast. And when he arrived, Alex says I'm writing a book. And Larry said to Alex: well, if you're writing a book, then you should talk to this guy.

You should talk to Cal because he's written two of my books with me and he can help you. So Alex did get to sit down to talk with Larry but I became very close with Alex at that point. So when I think of success, I think of everything Alex was trying to find out.

That's one. The second is another boxer, George Foreman who you might remember.

Tim Ferriss: My mom's favorite boxer.

Cal Fussman: Really?

Tim Ferriss: Oh, yeah. North Carolina she remembers the old George.

Cal Fussman: The old George. Now, the old George was a bigger Mike Tyson.

Cal Fussman: Oh, my God, terrifying.

Cal Fussman: Tyson was what, six feet maybe? George Foreman was six-three, 220 and just had a string of vicious knockouts and won the heavyweight title by knocking Joe Frazier down six times. One time, he literally hit him with an upper cut and uprooted Joe Frazier like he was a tree stump.

Tim Ferriss: It looks like a super hero movie. For people, I'm sure you can find footage of it but if you look at George Foreman/Frazier knockdown or knockout, just the footage is unbelievable.

Cal Fussman: You're looking at somebody there who George Foreman grew up in a very tangled situation. His personality was formed one by living in poverty. He would go to school in the mornings with a brown paper bag that had no food in it. And he would blow it up to make it look like there was food in it so he wouldn't be embarrassed by the other kids. On top of that, his siblings, his sisters, would make fun of him. He was younger. They would say: you a mohead. You a mohead.

And George Foreman had no idea what a mohead meant but he knew it wasn't good. He would hear that and he would chase his sisters around when he heard you a mohead, you a mohead, and finally, years later, he grew up and he found out what they were

saying. George Foreman's mom was married to Mr. Foreman, but they separated for awhile. While they were separated, his mom went off with a guy named Leroy Moorehead, conceived George and then went back to Mr. Foreman.

And so when he was born, his siblings who were Foremans would call him: you a mohead, you a mohead. And so there was this angry part of George.

Tim Ferriss: Very angry.

Cal Fussman: To the point where he told me people would be scared to ask him for an autograph. When he would walk into a place, people would look down. He had this surliness was a big part oil and gas his demeanor. When he went to fight Mohammed Ali in Zaire, he was the undefeated champ, people feared for Ali's life. And in fact, Ali would not watch George Foreman hit the heavy bag; it was too scary. This guy could hit that hard. What Ali saw was George Foreman had so much anger in him that when he came out, he just came out to bludgeon whoever was in front of him.

And Ali had a sense that if he could make Foreman expend his energy and not land those punches, to have those punches come off his arms, if he could infuriate Foreman to the point where Foreman lost his cool and punched himself out, he figured out a way to win. And naturally, in the heat of Africa, it was basically Ali set this thing up perfectly. Foreman arrived with a German shepherd, not knowing that the Zairians had in their history a memory of German shepherds being brought in by the Belgians to keep them under control.

So the Zairians immediately hated George Foreman. And a chant grew out of it. Ali boomayi, Ali kill him. And the bell rang and George Foreman came at Ali, and Ali didn't move. He just kept his back against the ropes with his hands up.

Tim Ferriss: This was the rope a dope?

Cal Fussman: This was the rope a dope. And George Foreman is just slugging away, and Ali would open his guard up just a little and say: is that all you got? And close his guard and Foreman was just getting more and more infuriated, just punch after punch; first round, second round. Those of us who are watching, and I was watching on closed circuit television on a big screen in St. Louis at the time, you were almost crying because you were screaming at Ali: get out

of the way, dance do something. W couldn't see what was happening.

He kept talking to George. We couldn't hear him talking. Oh man, that's it? That's all you got? And Foreman is just throwing shot after shot after shot. And then all of a sudden, in the fourth round, you see Foreman throw a shot, and Ali just duck under it and then just throw a jab straight back in Foreman's face and Foreman's head snapped back and we realized, oh, my God, he's punched himself out. As the fight continues a few more rounds, Ali nails him the one right hand.

It's so hot, Foreman's exhausted, Ali nails him with a right hand, Foreman goes down, can't beat the count and he's crushed. It must be akin to what Rhonda Rousey, for those who are younger and watch mixed martial arts, what Rhonda Rousey went through after her recent defeat. Where you think somebody is invincible and then all of a sudden they're on their back.

Tim Ferriss: One head kick later.

Cal Fussman: That's right. And George Foreman, for 20 years, could never get another title shot, He retired and he did something, and he told me what he did. And he said this was the hardest thing when you talk about success. I asked him a question about success, and he said the hardest thing you can do in life is to change your character. And basically, in his early 40s he came back to boxing but he was completely different. He was no longer the surly guy; he was a guy who would do ads for eating hamburgers, smiling and laughing.

Tim Ferriss: Correct me if I'm wrong. I remember his comeback promotional videos where he'd be going for his boxing run and people would be handing him food?

Cal Fussman: That's right. And he starts his comeback at I think more than 300 pounds.

Tim Ferriss: Big guy.

Cal Fussman: He's a big guy and he's in his 40s. But it's what he changed in his head. Now he was smiling.

Tim Ferriss: What did he do to change that?

Cal Fussman: He realized that surliness and that anger is what brought him down against Mohammed Ali. So fast forward, he's 45 years old and he gets a heavyweight title fight against a guy 20 years younger named Michael Moore.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, I remember. Southpaw.

Cal Fussman: Southpaw, who is much faster, a little lighter but should be able to move around George with ease and just put punches into George's face without George being able to respond. But here's the thing. Foreman came into the ring wearing the exact, red trunks that he was wearing when Ali hit him and put him down. When Moore's trainer saw that, he recognized it and thought uh-oh, something's up here. And basically, George didn't waste any energy.

He rearranged his character had Moore, for the first nine rounds, completely out boxed him, moved around. George just kept his hands up, tried to land, could barely even land and his face started to get swollen. The tenth round started and his trainer, who, coincidentally, was Angelo Dundee, Mohammed Ali's trainer who was in the opposing corner in Zaire, basically said to him: George, you're way behind; you gotta do something. And George just kept moving forward and without wasting energy, just saw one moment and he threw a right hand. He still had the power.

He still had everything that he had when he was young power-wise, and he clipped Moore straight on the jaw. and Michael Moore went down and couldn't beat the count. Foreman went over to the corner, got down on his knees, thanked the Lord and to me, that was a symbol of success because he needed to change who he was in order to have that success. And he did it at 45. So that's the best answer I can give you.

Tim Ferriss: Love George Foreman. This just reinvigorated so much more enthusiasm about learning more about George. It brings back so many memories because I remember that fight. Also, I want to say George used what I want to say was the crab defense. In other words, he didn't hold his forearms together perpendicular to the floor, but they were kind of crossed over in front of his face. Such a good story.

Cal Fussman: It was all designed. he knew he was going to endure punishment, and he knew that he had to do it in a way that expended the least amount of energy, and he knew he just had to put himself in the right position to land that one shot. So it's a beautiful story to see

somebody take their weakest point and do something within themselves to change who they are.

Tim Ferriss: And the history repeats itself irony of that fight that he won also is that Michael was known as a very angry guy. He had a criminal record and probably lost for some of the same reasons.

Cal Fussman: That's right. In fact, I'd have to go back and watch the fight but I'm sure his trainer, who was aware, was probably saying: you know, you're way ahead, take it easy, stay away. And he probably said what are you, crazy? I got his under control. Boom, one shot.

Tim Ferriss: Incredible. What is the book or books you've given most as gifts, other than your own which obviously, for people listening, you know I'll link to everything in the show notes, as well.

Cal Fussman: Hard question to answer because it's almost like wine. Every meal, you're going to have another experience with different people, different food. I like to give books that I've loved. I mentioned meeting Alex, and he didn't know how to write a book. And he's like, I want to write a great book. You could just tell it was bursting out of him. So I gave him Gabrielle Garcia Marquez's *One Hundred Years of Solitude* for him to know okay, if you've never written a book and you're going to tell somebody you want to write a great book, alright, read this and know what a great book is.

So my gifts tend to judge what the person needs and then fill that need. And no different in wine. If somebody's having a steak, I'm probably not going to give them a Riesling. I'll give them something to complement the steak.

Tim Ferriss: I'll give you more specific circumstances. Let's say that somebody came to you and they said: you know what, I'm a bored billionaire and I want to give three books to every graduating high school senior in the country this year.

Cal Fussman: Wow, what a question. Okay. One book that people should read, and in fact, I've got it with me right now. Let me pull it out, here. One of the blurbs on this book actually says, as Tony Morrison, this is required reading.

Tim Ferriss: Wow. That's a strong endorsement.

Cal Fussman: Tony Morrison is a great African American writer. This book is called *Between the World and Me*, and it's by a guy named Ta-

Nehisi Coates. It's a letter to his son about being a black male in America. I think it is required reading just because if we want to understand what is going on, we see what's happening in Ferguson, Missouri. It just seems like it's month after month after month we see protests and problems.

And this is just a way of redirecting your eyesight to a place that you normally wouldn't go. It's an amazing thing about this book because as I'm reading it, I was walking down the street and I passed a news box with the *Los Angeles Times* in it. On the front page there was this statistic that said that basically every juvenile that's incarcerated in the State of California, it costs us \$260,000 a year.

Tim Ferriss: That is a lot. More than any Ivy League education.

Cal Fussman: There you go. Think of that. If you took that money and put it into lifting that same kid, who knows what would happen. there's DNA involved, there's a lot of stuff involved but it just made me realize why aren't we putting the resources in before rather than just paying this money out we don't even know that we're putting it out? And so it's just a book that makes you see the world differently.

Another book that I would recommend, it's a book that I'm reading now.

Tim Ferriss: And just for those people wondering, *Between the World and Me*, this is a short book, about 130 pages, national book award winner. I will order that as soon as we finish this chat. But you mentioned the second.

Cal Fussman: The second book is, is it okay if I give you two?

Tim Ferriss: You can give me two, absolutely.

Cal Fussman: I can do two? Just because these are two that I'm reading now, so it's just hot off the press. It's a book called *Speak Like Churchill, Stand Like Lincoln*.

Tim Ferriss: I love the title.

Cal Fussman: I think I'm carrying it around with me, as well.

Tim Ferriss: This is amazing.

Cal Fussman: You hit me at the right time with this question. It's written by James. C. Humes. For anyone who wants to speak, and if you're a high school senior, at some point you're going to have to get up and speak, it's a great book because there's all kinds of tips on everything about speaking.

Tim Ferriss: Subtitle: 21 Powerful Secrets of History's Greatest Speakers.

Cal Fussman: There's this great anecdote in this book that really helped me as I was preparing to give my speech. Because it's hard to memorize a speech. And then I'm reading about Ronald Regan, known as a great communicator, American president. When he spoke, he riveted people. When he was a young man, again we're talking about basically the same age as the people you just mentioned; what would you recommend for the high school senior. Actually, Regan was just getting out of college, and he got a job in radio in Iowa. He was very good conversationally on the air.

But then it came time to read the advertisements. And for some reason, he was so stiff and awkward reading these advertisements that the advertisers basically said get him off the air, and they fired him. He went back to his room and he's feeling horrible about it because he loved being on the radio; he loved communicating. He wondered, what can I do in order to get my job back? So I guess FDR was doing the Fireside Chats and he realized how riveting those were.

So he got those chats and he started to read them. But what he did was he would look at the words, and then almost memorize the phrase in his head, then look up and say the words conversationally. So he wasn't trying to memorize them by reading it off the page. He would just take a few of the words, then look up, give you those words, look down. He would never speak while he was looking down. And then he went back to radio and that's how he did his advertisements and it worked. The book is just filled with little tips like that that will make it so much easier for anybody who's got to get up and give a speech.

Tim Ferriss: I'm going to get another book for my list. Do you have any favorite documentaries or movies?

Cal Fussman: You know, it's a really interesting question. I probably would have told you that there's a movie, *Cinema Paradiso*. You love that movie?

Tim Ferriss: Great film.

Cal Fussman: I would mention that but something happened to me recently where a documentary and a movie came together that provided this amazing experience. The documentary was called *Men on Wire*, and it was about Philippe Petit's walk on a wire across the towers of the World Trade Center. It's an amazing documentary. Everything that he had to go through, almost like a spy or an espionage agent to figure out how to get up on the roof.

We're not even talking about how do you walk a rope. That's one thing. But then to wonder how do you get to the top of the World Trade Center as it's being built and get a wire from one side to the other, to stabilize it at night when nobody's watching. And the documentary takes you through the whole thing; it's just amazing.

Tim Ferriss: And the way they pieced it together with the alternating black and white reenactments, just the cinematography and the pacing is genius.

Cal Fussman: It's definitely my favorite documentary. But then last year, Robert Zemeckis did a movie called *The Walk*.

Tim Ferriss: Is that Joseph Gordon Leavitt?

Cal Fussman: That's right.

Tim Ferriss: I haven't seen that yet.

Tim Ferriss: Here's the thing. I saw this movie nine times.

Tim Ferriss: *The Walk*?

Cal Fussman: *The Walk*. I saw this movie nine times but you've got to see it on 3D Imax. Because one of the innovative things about this film on 3D Imax is you literally feel like you are on the wire. People left the theater vomiting. I knew everything about that story because as you mentioned, I worked at Windows of the World. So when I was serving wine at the top of Windows of the World every day, I was looking down at basically what Philippe Petit was looking down at when he was crossing this wire. And I'd seen the documentary so I knew that basically not only did he walk on the wire, but he laid down on the wire on his back.

Tim Ferriss: Unbelievable.

Cal Fussman: And then the police are coming, and the police had been haunting him for years because for whenever he would try and juggle or walk the wire in order to get people to give change, they would be trying to chase them away. So he had this cat and mouse game going with the police all these years, and now he's on the wire more than 100 stories above New York City.

And the police are there and they can't touch him. He can do whatever he wants on this wire. So the tables are turning and yet, in this movie, when he steps on that wire, I knew everything that was going to happen on that walk. I'm begging him: no, don't do it, please don't do it. I completely suspended my disbelief. And let me tell you how much. I started taking people night after night to see this movie, again and again because I want to gauge their reactions.

Tim Ferriss: Gave them motion sickness pills beforehand?

Cal Fussman: I warned them. I said if you've got a fear of heights, don't come. Go watch Robert De Niro in *The Apprentice* or whatever they called that movie. What hit me was there's this one scene in the movie where he's learning how to walk the tightrope. This is back in France; that's where he's from. He's like two steps away from getting back to the platform and he slips and has to catch the wire with his hand. He's like 50 feet above ground or something, and he manages to get back to the platform.

He comes down and his teacher is there. His teacher basically says to him, it's the last two steps. The people who die, they die on those last two steps, Remember that. And in fact, Philippe Petit was paying him to get those lessons. And when Philippe Petit went to give him money for that lesson, the teacher said no, this lesson you get for free. This doesn't cost you anything. So I knew this story cold I'd read his book, I've seen the documentary many times and I'm watching this film.

And when he falls down early on to get that lesson, it's shot in a way where the pole literally comes out of the screen right at your head. So the first time, you're just swaying immediately to the right or the left to get out of the way. Okay so how I'm watching it the second time. I know this pole is coming at my head. Every time, on the ninth time, the pole was coming straight at my head; I'm ducking out of the way. It was that visceral an experience and the direction was just amazing; I love the acting. If you can see that movie on 3D Imax, please do. It's just wonderful.

Tim Ferriss: I guess I'll put out a request to perhaps the people involved with making that film, if they happen to be listening or if you know the people involved, since people might not get to see the theatrical release in 3D, talk to the people working with virtual reality. Get in touch with the Oculus folks or some of these other studios, DAQRI or whomever might be able to translate some of this to an immersive experience for folks because that's coming down the pike, too.

Cal Fussman: That'd be beautiful.

Tim Ferriss: You know, I feel like we're just going to have to do a round two sometime.

Cal Fussman: I'll come back anytime.

Tim Ferriss: I'll ask three more. If you could have a billboard anywhere with anything on it, what would you put on it?

Cal Fussman: One word: listen.

Tim Ferriss: Listen.

Cal Fussman: I don't know what reaction that would get but I would like to see the reaction on people's faces when they saw that. Because I think that listening is not an art form. Well, it is an art form; people just aren't using it as an art form, but it is an art form. A lot of great things could be achieved through listening.

Tim Ferriss: What advice would you give your 30-year-old self, and if you could place us again where you were at 30.

Cal Fussman: I would not give myself one word of advice, and I'll tell you why. Because if I would have given myself that advice at 30, it would have moved me maybe one centimeter in one direction that put my life in a different place. And I needed to be on a very specific seat on a very specific bus at a very specific time in order to meet the woman that became my wife and is the mother of my kids. So I couldn't have that moved in any way. I needed everything to happen just the way it did in order to have that moment, in order to have the rest of my life.

So after that, I'm sure there are times where I would have given myself advice. Really the time I needed advice was when I was in college and there was so much offered and so little I took advantage of.

Tim Ferriss: What would your advice be either to your kids or to people going into college when they say: Uncle Cal, what should I take? I just don't even know what to do with myself. Paradox of choice; I can't figure it out.

Cal Fussman: If they want to travel, you get a chance to learn four languages, five languages. And it's going to be so relaxed. All you've got to do is just go into the class and then meet somebody from the opposite sex who speaks the language and you're going to be going out and talking in the new language, and you could do that over and over again in college; you've got that time.

One of the things that if it was me knowing that I wanted to be a writer, or knowing that I'm now going to be speaking, and I'm going to be speaking about questions people ask when they're hiring, I would love to have studied human behavior. Because I know that when a company is looking to fill a job, if the person doing the interview understands the role that needs to be filled and understands human behavior, they can ask questions to the applicants that will fill that role in a really good way. That's my hunch.

Tim Ferriss: Have you ever heard the story of the book that Newt Gingrich used to navigate politics, at least one that he's credited with a lot of whatever success he's had? *Chimpanzee Politics*. I'm not kidding. I am not kidding.

Cal Fussman: I'm going to write that one down and I'm going to go home and order it.

Tim Ferriss: I am not kidding. What about as a writer or to a kid who'd graduating from college and says to himself or herself, should I go on to get my MFA or continue to go to a specialty journalism school or writing school? If they'd only taken maybe one or two classes that required a lot of writing, what advice would you give to them?

Cal Fussman: I would tell them just write. The great thing about it, and I'm not knocking the schooling because as we talked about earlier, I owe everything to the University of Missouri Journalism School. It sent me on my way and then the connections. On the other hand, all you need to do to be a writer is to write. And not only that, but all you need to do is to find places that are interested in taking your

writing. It doesn't have to be for much money. But you can go out, especially now, you don't even need a physical publication.

Now you can just create a blog on the internet and just start writing. So I would advise people if you want to be a writer, write and just keep writing and keep writing. If you have the means and the will to go to school and get a teacher or teachers who can help you through, even better. But nothing should really stop you from writing and you shouldn't use "I need to go to school first" as an excuse to put off writing. I need to make the school make me write. You make you write.

Tim Ferriss: Yeah, if you don't have that intrinsic motivation, it's going to be hard to make anything happen because you won't always have a school teacher to whack you with a ruler.

Cal Fussman: That's right. And not only that, the other thing is just put yourself in a position where you have no money and you need to write something to make money, and if you need to eat, unless you can find a bar that's putting out olives and little chicken fingers, you're going to write and get paid so that you can eat.

Tim Ferriss: I remember talking to a friend of mine who is a journalist, writes for a number of very well known newspapers. He always laughs when he has to listen to book authors like myself sort of winge and pontificate about writer's block. He just scoffs at the whole idea. He's like, I don't have the luxury of having writer's block. He's like, I have a deadline, a deliverable of whatever it is, 4 p.m., 5 p.m.; he's like I can't muse about the subtleties of writer's block. He has to ship. He has to ship words every day or whenever it might be; every week.

What are your thoughts on writer's block, if that's not too general a question?

Cal Fussman: I only had it once. What happened was I was writing for Esquire and working on a column called *The Perfect Man*. The idea was basically in line with this conversation. I was going to take all my flaws and all my mistakes and then go to experts who were going to teach me how to overcome them, and then I was going to write about the experience so that everybody could have the collected wisdom. So I learned how to walk through using Alexander Technique, I learned how to publicly speak by going in the boxing ring with Michael Buffer and announcing a fight.

Tim Ferriss: Sounds like a fun gig.

Cal Fussman:

That was great. I learned how to lose weight by going to Jack LaLanne, who was the exercise champion of his day. I went through and learned how to barbecue through Steven Raichlen, author of *The Barbecue Bible*. And one of the last things I did was go to learn about wine. Because if you are a man, you want to have a feeling that you can go into a restaurant with a group of people, the wine list comes to you and you don't feel like oh, man, what am I going to do? I don't know what's what, here.

And then you don't know if the waiter is going to try to unload a lousy bottle that they can't sell on you, or a bottle for a lot of money; you're helpless. So I wanted to learn enough to know how to walk into a restaurant with confidence and order what I want. And the solution to that was to be trained, to be the sommelier for a night at Windows of the World which sold, for a time, more wine than any other restaurant on the planet at the top of the World Trade Center. I had no idea where this adventure was going to send me but it took me two years to learn all about wine.

Because you then find out you have to go to these places where they make the wine, and you have to understand the difference between the varietals and the wine list at Windows of the World, it was hundreds of pages. To know all those wines was almost impossible but you start to get an idea. I had world class sommeliers teaching me and for one night I was the sommelier at Windows on the World. It was an amazing experience.

One of the great things I did is I had a guy who I knew come in. he brought his wife. It's like the first couple of the evening. I seated them right next to a window so you're looking down on New York from 106 stories or whatever. I had a bottle of champagne, Lordo champagne from France, which it basically was like a \$10.00 bottle of champagne. But nobody new that. This had been served at the Assemblée Nationale in France. It was a basic bottle of champagne.

I took it out to the couple; they were celebrating their anniversary. I walked over with a flourish and I announced that I was serving Lordo Champagne, and that it had never been served at these heights before and it would never be served at these heights again. And this woman looks at me. She didn't know who I was; her husband did. She just broke out in tears. And then the husband had never tasted the champagne before but I poured it, they both put it up and they're like: oh, Cal, we never knew what champagne was before this moment.

It teaches you that the wine and the moment are inextricably linked. I can take a great moment and make a great wine out of it, and I can take a great wine and make a great moment out of it. In any event, the evening transpired and it was great, it was profound, it was also funny. I'd spill wine down a glass because I had to be moving really quick; there was a lot of people. And like oh, that's inexcusable. That should never happen here. That bottle is on the house!

Everybody at the table is like: oh, this is great. And people at the adjacent tables are saying: come over here, spill some here, spill some here. We get through the night, it's a delightful time and really memorable. Now, I go home to write the story and I start to go through my notes because it's taken me two years to get this experience. And the planes crash into the World Trade Center. I remember going to Ground Zero a week later. The military took me around in a Humvee. I was still so overwhelmed that I was almost knocked out when I saw it.

Because I remember seeing there was this thin coat of white dust over everything. You could see in a parking lot this coating of dust over the cars. And I actually said to the guy in the Army who was taking me around, I said why don't those people come back and get their cars? And he put his hand on my shoulder and he said: Cal, those cars don't have any owners anymore. It's very hard to explain the enormity but I just couldn't write. How could I translate this experience of utter joy, learning all about this amazing beverage that transformed lives, meeting all these friends along the way.

Wherever you would go, it was like traveling around the world again. It would just open up a party, and that party would invite you to another party, and another party, and another party. And so there I am, having this amazing experience and then on top of it, for one night I was the sommelier. And not only that, but toward the middle of the night – people were pressing \$20 in my hand; they thought I was really the sommelier. And a few days later, somebody who came in that night, and nobody knew that I wasn't the real sommelier, somebody came in three days later and asked for me.

So I was feeling so good about the experience, and right after that the planes came in and took the towers down. Now, I've got to write the story about this. And the editor, he now knows. He's basically bankrolled this thing for two years. Same guy who

bankrolled me going up against Julio Cesar Chavez bankrolled the wine story. I'm flying around the world tasting the wines in France, the wines in Italy, the wines in Germany, going to California. And he allowed me to go through the whole experience.

And now he knows something amazing has got to come out of this. Because I saw how much he put in, and we all know this seminal moment in American history so he's got to step up to it. And I couldn't. I would stare in front of the computer for hours at a time and nothing would come out. Like my eyes would be bleeding. And every time I would have to go into the office to see the editor, I knew, we both knew; where's the story? Years started passing.

He started to do things to try to help me and push it out of me, whether it was lighthearted or hey; like years now. The movie *Sideways*, which is about wine, had come out. Wine is really hot now; now is the time. So the editor is really trying to push this story out of me in the best way he can. It might be lighthearted with a little offhanded joke. It might be: hey, come on, it's years now; we're waiting for this story. The movie *Sideways* comes out; it's a big hit in the wine world.

Now he's saying, this is the time that the story needs to come out. I can't do it. I'd go to the computer almost night after night and it's the most painful thing because I never had writer's block before. But there was just nothing that would come out of me. It was like a wine that wasn't ready to be served. It needed to be in the barrel, only you don't know how long it needs to be in the barrel, and you're feeling all this guilt. I had these copious notes in boxes.

And I put them down in the basement; okay, let me just get it out of my face. Because every time I would go into my office, I would see these boxes and I would just flinch.

Tim Ferriss: Oh, it seems like a huge anxiety trigger; just the undone homework assignment.

Cal Fussman: The ultimate undone homework assignment that your boss has basically bankrolled for a couple of years. And so you basically know that you can't go in with anymore big ideas until that is completed. So it really affected me but there was nothing I could do about it and I put these notes away in the basement. And then we had this terrible ice storm. I was living in North Carolina at the time. Everything turned into mold in my basement. All the notes got black.

So I had notes of anything; basically everything had been wiped out. My notes were Ground Zero afterward. So now, how am I going to do this? But you know, there was a writer who taught me something very early in my career. His name was Harry Crews. I don't know if you've ever heard of him.

Tim Ferriss: No.

Cal Fussman: He wrote a book called *Feast of Snakes*. Harry Crews also wrote for Esquire. If you're a young man, and I don't even know how this book would translate now but it was a real kind of macho –

Tim Ferriss: What was the name again?

Cal Fussman: *Feast of Snakes*. He wrote another book called *Car*, about a guy eating a car. This guy was out there. As soon as I read these books I said, I've got to meet this guy. I've got to meet this guy. So I started to tell people, I'm going to go meet Harry Crews. And people started looking at me saying, are you sure? I said, what to you mean? They said, his drinking is legendary, plus the amount of drugs he puts in his body, you're not going to be able to stay with this guy.

You're going to hurt yourself. And so naturally, I get in my car, I drive 20 straight hours down to Gainesville, Florida. This is when I was living in New York. I go and I drive right up to his house and knock on the door, and there's no response. I knock again, no response. I could almost hear like a snoring. So I just opened the door...

Tim Ferriss: Oh, my God, in Florida.

Cal Fussman: And Harry is laid out on a Lazy Boy chair with an empty bottle of rum on his belly. I get close to him and his head is just moving around, he's getting himself out of sleep. He says, what do you want? I said, Harry, I just read *Feast of Snakes* and I just drove 20 hours straight to see you. Well, why don't you drive over to Gator Gulch and let's get us some alcohol. I drive over to the Gator Gulch – I think that's what it was called; it was something like that. And they've already got a carton filled with alcohol for me to bring back.

Tim Ferriss: The usual.

Cal Fussman: Yeah, the usual. I come back and we start drinking and naturally, after a little while, I had just been driving for 20 hours and now

I've been drinking and I'm starting to float away. And he's getting more lucid. This was before the drugs came out. I said to him: Harry, you're a writer. Do you keep a diary? How can you drink like this, and do all these drugs, and remember anything? And he looked at me and he smiled and he said: boy, the good shit sticks. And it was that line that saved me when I needed to write the wine story. Because I always knew the good shit sticks.

The moments that were truly great were the moments that I needed. And almost ten years passed. And in a chance meeting with a woman who was in a terrible position. She had loved her husband, her husband had died, she was alone, time had passed, she was ready to go out and meet somebody again. She said I'm older, I've never really dated, I don't know what to do. And I said to her, join a wine class. Because you will meet people, and just by the way they talk about their wines, you're going to know if you should like them or not.

And she said, wow, that's a good idea. And something in that conversation opened up a pathway. I went to a bar, and I'm sitting down and remember, this whole thing started with me just wanting to be able to give somebody instruction. When the wine list came before me, I could give the waiter the instruction, this is what I want, without feeling like I didn't know what I was doing. So I had this conversation with the woman, and a couple nights later I said, you know what, let me just write down the good shit, the good shit that stuck.

And I'm sitting at bar and I'm writing down all the stuff, the good shit that stuck. The bartender is pouring drinks and a waiter came back with an Italian dessert wine. It was a white wine and the waiter said to the bartender: the people don't like it; they say there's something wrong with it. It was Vin Santo. So the bartender, he was a young guy and I think he really didn't know much about wine; he was like a college kid as a bartender.

And so he said it's Vin Santo, it's not cheap. And I said wait a minute, let me smell that wine, because he brought the wine back. I said pour me a glass. And so I swirled it around, I put it up to my nose and I said no, it's no good. And the way I said it, I must have said it with such conviction that the bartender said okay.

Tim Ferriss: You said it the same way that Jesus said his name to you in the locker room.

Cal Fussman: That's right. That's exactly it. I knew this wine was no good. So the bartender said to me, how did you know? We got into a conversation, and he had told me that he had been in a choir. He said, I'm not really a bartender. He explained that when he was young, he was a singer and when he was young, he had actually gone to the Vatican and sang in a choir for the pope. And I said okay, fine, then you'll understand this. When you put that wine to your nose, listen to it.

You can tell that there's something certainly in the taste; maybe you can get it from the smell. It starts out okay but there's somebody singing off key in there. And I don't know if it's the way the wine was stored but in the middle of that taste of wine are off keynotes. And I don't know, maybe the wine was a little corked, maybe it was just the way they stored it.

But as soon as he heard that, he realized it; it translated for him that okay, when somebody in the choir has got a voice that isn't hitting what the rest of us are hitting, it's a problem. And he understood that. He looked at me and he said, thanks. And I knew that was the end of the story. As soon as he said it, I went to the keyboard and I wrote the whole thing up.

Tim Ferriss: That's amazing. Do you recall the title of the piece?

Cal Fussman: Yeah, it's called *Drinking at 1300 Feet*.

Tim Ferriss: Cal, you're a great man. you're a very, very generous person and we will have to do this again sometime. But in the meantime, I want to let you get to your dinner and would love to direct people to where they can find you and more about you, because you've spent a lifetime gathering, unearthing and telling other people's stories. Of course you've told some of your own, but I want to hear more and more of these stories. Next time I feel like we should have some wine.

Cal Fussman: Next time we'll do this with wine.

Tim Ferriss: Where can people find you online?

Cal Fussman: They can go to CalFussman.com.

Tim Ferriss: That's C-A-L F-U-S-S-M-A-N dot com.

Cal Fussman: Send a message. I'm just starting to speak. Anybody interested in listening to some stories or getting tips on interviewing, or tips on interviewing for a job, I'm here.

Tim Ferriss: Go to the website and they can click on a contact form or something like that to let you know? Are you on social media at all?

Cal Fussman: Not really. This is all like a new adventure for me. I don't even know how to promote myself. It's just happening.

Tim Ferriss: I'll tell you what. If I can help get Jocko Willink, [inaudible] former Navy Seal on Twitter, I can help figure out a way to assist you in not getting that. Maybe I can give you sort of the choir a cappella analogy version of this type of thing. Cal, this is so much fun. I always love our conversations. And as always, thank you so much for taking the time.

Cal Fussman: It's a beautiful experience. I hope we have many more. And let me tell you something; you're really good at what you do.

Tim Ferriss: Thank you.

Cal Fussman: Thank you.

Tim Ferriss: I'm standing on the shoulders of giants and you've been very, very generous with your time and with your advice so I really do appreciate it. And for everybody listening, thank you for listening.