



Titans as Teens

Transcript: Ernest White II, Episode 15

The podcast is here:

<https://www.titansasteens.com/ernest-white-ii-tv-host-and-entrepreneur/>

Brody: [00:00:00] Hey, all Brody here with the new episode of Titans As Teens, a podcast where I have detailed conversations with interesting people from all walks of life, about their teen experience and the knowledge they have for teens today. Today, I had the pleasure of speaking with television host writer and activist, Ernest White II.

Ernest: [00:00:24] We created something that I think is amazing, and that is helpful to the world. And now we're looking at the next thing, you know, centered in helping people feel seen, feel empowered and feel loved, which is really what the work is about. .

Brody: [00:00:38] Ernest is an incredible person to speak with. I felt as if I was learning new things almost every minute.

Growing up, Ernest knew he wanted to travel the world. After a sponsored trip to Sweden in 1994, he knew he wanted to travel for the rest of his life. Ernest founded Fly Brother as a blog in 2008, but then grew it into his own television show, podcast, and eventually job. Ernest's experiences growing up and traveling around the world, make him one of the most open and interesting people I've had the pleasure of speaking with. To begin, however, I asked him about his experience growing up in Florida.

Ernest: [00:01:17] All right. So, at my high school experience in Florida was, I can't say it was the most exciting or most enjoyable experience in life. I actually was bullied, I was fat. I was probably 360 pounds when I graduated high school. My parents were both teachers, so I kind of, you know, my father was the band director at my high school. Which meant I couldn't do anything fun necessarily because I would definitely get in trouble. There were too many people who knew me and my parents. And I would say that while I had some friends, I also had a lot of, there were a lot of students who just made fun of me for being a nerd for being fat, for being gay. Not that anybody really knew at the time or was, this was in the nineties. No one was really talking about sexuality the way we are now in the, in the high school sense. But, um, yeah, it was definitely an experience that I do not want to relive. Uh, but I also recognize that it was quite formative in how I ended up engaging with other people, engaging with the world. So.

Brody: [00:02:27] Absolutely like you're one of the most extroverted people I've met. I can tell already. Um, and I think that's very admirable. So



Titans as Teens

Ernest: [00:02:34] Thank you man, thank you. I honestly, as much as I feel like I had, uh, kids who disliked me, I didn't really, I mean, I just liked the treatment, but I can't really say I hated the kids. You know, I was always trying to think of ways that we could do interesting things together, as, as fellow students. I was one of the kids that was always trying to organize things and participate with some of the teachers to create trips and, uh, plays and, and other, other bits of creation for my fellow students. Just because I don't know, it's always fun to do things in groups. (laughs)

Brody: [00:03:11] Yeah, absolutely. I mean, everything's more fun with other people, really. So.

Ernest: [00:03:15] I will say this, I had a lot of support from, again, other, the teachers would always support me. They'd say when, when kids would say mean things to me, they try to be supportive and, and figure out ways to encourage me to keep on doing interesting things and to not let the other kids get me down.

My parents, of course, my mom used to always say, well, they talked about Jesus as if that made me feel better. I'm like, mom, I'm like 15. Uh, but you know, I would have a support, but it was generally from older people and a few of my fellow students who kind of felt like I was getting the raw end of the deal there.

I don't believe that we're given things that we can't handle. In the moment that never feels fair, nor does it feel that encouraging. But at the same time, you know, it was great training for me to really look past other people's pains, other people's traumas, because I was in an environment where most students, especially high school students are going through some kind of an angst, you know, in so many different ways.

And you never know what people's home lives and home situations are like. And I feel like there was an understanding of that, at least on some level that I had, like recognizing that a lot of those kids were just unhappy with their own lives and they took it out.

Brody: [00:04:40] Absolutely. I mean it is the cliché that like the bullies, just trying to make themselves feel better or whatever, but I mean, it generally ends up being true.

Ernest: [00:04:48] A hundred percent. Exactly. And it's something that I think we have a better understanding of now.

Brody: [00:04:54] Um hmm. Excuse me, if this is like, kind of an out there question, but when did you either come out or discover you were gay?

Ernest: [00:05:03] I always knew I was gay. I think just from the age of five or something, just realizing that something was different about me and then certainly growing up and I was socialized like everyone else and a heteronormative society, but I also recognize that that wasn't necessarily my orientation. And I don't know. It always just was. Like, it wasn't some



Titans as Teens

things that kind of felt apart or separate from me if you will. It was. And at the same time, I mean, I definitely had to deal with kids, you know, calling me names,

Brody: [00:05:38] Homophobia?

Ernest: [00:05:40] It was that. At the same time, it wasn't any worse than what, you know, what was doled out to kids who were fat or kids who were poor or whatever else, you know?

Um, so not minimizing it, just saying that it wasn't necessarily, I don't think I was targeted in any way, other than just being different, if you will. And being different, you know, when everybody's in a place of, of trying to conform and that's, they've said they used to say that high school never ends, you know, because there is still this continual attempt to be accepted to, to conform to what is supposedly society's idea or ideal of sexuality, of masculinity and femininity of affluence and of, of, uh, what is accepted and what we all should be kind of aiming for aspiring to, if you will.

And I will say, you know, we all, learn how to perform masculinity and femininity in order to impress other people like ourselves. And when I say that, I mean, dudes are only as much dudes as they need to be for other dudes to see that and to kind of, you know, reward them for that. If you will. You know, all, all men do it, regardless of sexuality, we all try to kind of be a certain way so we can be liked and accepted and be a part of the tribe or whatever.

It's kind of it's, affected by the society that we live in, it's affected by the systems that set us up to, to need and desire something that's different than what exists right now. In order for us to go buy things, everything from toothpaste to shoes, to iPhones, et cetera, Cars, and houses and trips and all of these things.

We do that in order to kind of, on some level, impress other people, even if it's subconsciously. Because that's what's set up for us to, to, to attempt to achieve, you know. And it's always something just beyond our grasp. As opposed to learning that we are exactly who and what we need to be at all times. And we're always perfect in our imperfection.

So, but those are lessons that I learned, of course, in the many years since high school, I knew none of that, what I was going through it. And, um, that said, I came out to my parents when I was in college, which would have been in the late 1990s. And I had kind of. You know, I wouldn't say they weren't happy about it necessarily, but I, that was not an issue in my household, you know, to the point that. The way it is in other people's families. You know, I was not afraid of being put out of my house. I was generally accepted for my eccentricities from an early age. So, I would have to say, you know, I, I had it easier than a lot of other kids around that time who were gay and knew it.

Brody: [00:08:34] Absolutely. Yeah. I'm glad to hear it went well for you,

The logo features a stylized red letter 'T' with a white outline. To its right, the words "Titans" and "as Teens" are stacked vertically in a bold, black, sans-serif font.

Titans as Teens

Ernest: [00:08:38] Well, in quotation marks, absolutely. I mean, this was before Ru Paul's Drag Race. This was before people coming out, you know, famous people coming out, uh, as gay or bisexual. This was before it was legal to marry. You know, same sex, marriage was legal. This was before all of that stuff.

There were advances in gay rights and identity and that kind of thing, but it was just a different time. It wasn't that long ago, but it definitely it's several generations removed, I guess, from what kids are kind of experiencing nowadays. And at the same time, it was several generations removed from what kids may be 10 or 20 years older than me experienced.

Brody: [00:09:23] As someone who's going through high school right now, I can say I'm, I'm astounded basically by how much progress there has been made. What I see now and what I've learned about like 20 years ago, even

Ernest: [00:09:35] Right,

Brody: [00:09:35] Even just 20 years ago, it was insane how different it is. Like it was like four gay kids in my class, like this year of 90 kids. And it's awesome. And they don't feel like pressured at all. But do you think there's more society needs to do to integrate LGBTQ members into society? Or have we reached equality are we not?

Ernest: [00:09:56] Well, I mean, you know, LGBT members have always existed in society. There's just increasing names and labels that have increased since I was coming along.

I mean, I'm from a time period when we said "gay", obviously that was something that was either thrown at you as a, as an insult. Or an identity that you assumed. But even the word queer was strange for me to use, you know, it was either extremely academic or it was strange the way the word queer, you know, the original definition of the word.

Uh, and so then to kind of go with the acronyms and then have the letters continually to be, to be added to the acronym is something that I have to get used to just as much as anybody else does. And it's very interesting when I have conversations with younger people who are very adept at the nomenclature in a way that I'm not just because my experience has been very much centered in the G, um, but also, um, you know, of a certain age and experience up to now.

So, uh, that said, you know, again, we've always been here. There is an opportunity for people to identify more now than ever before. There is still like, every other group that is, let's say different quote unquote, from this supposedly mainstream or supposed normal. Even today, I received my first hate comments in my Facebook, where someone was saying she saw the show and you know, I'm calling you look gay in quotation marks and said, uh, you know, fairy princess.



Titans as Teens

And I'm just kind of like princess? That's what I was offended by. I'm a queen, what are you talking... Princess. I've got princesses of my own. But my point is that even in 2020 somebody is saying, you know, gay as if that's some kind of an insult. Like that kind of thing will unfortunately remain with us for who knows how long, just as misogyny remains with us, which really is what homophobia is.

It's a form of misogyny. Uh, just as transphobia is still is with us just as racism is still with us. You know. It's, it's not, none of these things are new because none of these people are new. It's just, now we've got much more awareness and I do feel like we've come obviously very far, and we've still got a long way to go. But I think we're going; the world is spinning faster than ever.

You know, people are aware more than ever about the people who are in touch with their empathic abilities, more than they ever have been. And I feel like that is showing many of us that we can... there is a way for us to cope it to, to be here on this planet. Not even co-exist, there's a way for us to not to be here on this planet and love each other as human beings, you know, as beings. Human canine, whatever, you know, and I think I'm hopeful in that way.

Brody: [00:12:59] Yeah. I mean, coexist the word. I mean, outside, like the spoken does kind of suggest separation in a way. Yeah. Even in meaning existing together. But I do have hope for my generation, at least of the new gen Z, I believe we're called, being more open than ever. That's at least growing up in California, that's what I've experienced, really. I even make fun of my dad these days, as you were saying, like adding all the letters on to LGBTQ plus. Um, because he can't say it that fast and I'm just like, Yo dad say LGBTQ plus really fast. And he just, can't it's really funny.

Ernest: [00:13:34] And I've been ha I've had conversations with people who were like, well, tell me about such something like I don't, that's not my experience now. Here's the thing. It's not to say that those letters don't necessarily belong together. You know, I think, um, we, there is something to be said for identity. There is something to be said for labels. There is something to be said for nomenclature when it comes to usefulness. It helps those things, help us identify what we are engaging with, you know, for our brain.

But when we think about the heart, there is no separateness. And so, it's head and heart. There is room for both, and you can be labeled free and still revel in the labels that we have to kind of help us, you know, understand the world a bit better. And so, when it comes to just recognizing that. A lot of things are under that umbrella back in the day, maybe in the 50, 60, 70. Or fifties definitely, and before that. People, we were all lumped in the same category. Perverts, you know, it was people who were not performatively, heterosexual, were considered perverts and social deviants. So, in that, under that umbrella would be lesbians, gays, transgender people, bisexual people questioning or queer intersex, whatever



Titans as Teens

these. And so, I'm saying all that to say, it's not that we weren't ever separate, but at the same time, there's a recognition that my experience is not a lesbian experience. My experience is definitely not a transgendered, experience. And that's important because there is still misogyny. There's transphobia that occurred there's racism, even within the LGBT et cetera community.

And those things need to be addressed because we have to recognize that while we are one, we still are living these individual experiences.

Brody: [00:15:27] Absolutely. I mean, I am a white dude. I that's pretty much my experience. I can't really imagine what it's like to be a gay black dude really.

Ernest: [00:15:37] No, but you're a young guy too, and you're coming along, you know, you're growing up in California, which kind of is different than growing up in Alabama. You know what I mean? So, it's you, you. Yes, you're a white dude.

Brody: [00:15:48] Really.

Ernest: [00:15:49] And, and that, and, and that's what, you know what I mean, one of the many different ways that we show up in the world. You know what I mean? And there's no value to that one way or the other. It's just, Hey, you know, you've got your experience and you can speak from that experience.

And that just means allowing other people to speak from their experiences, giving them the benefit of the doubt of knowing what their experience is like and letting them articulate that and not saying, oh, well, I don't believe necessarily, well, it's not your, it's not your experience to believe in or not. You know? And I think that's where we get into a lot of trouble when people are disbelieving of other people's lived experiences. Because it's not their experience. You know, who am I to say what life is like for you as a white guy growing up in Northern California? You know. The assumption is you're probably doing very well in life, but you might not be.

And that's the whole point, like, who am I to tell you otherwise,

Brody: [00:16:45] Yeah. That's why I like the idea of your show so much as well, because you're traveling all over the world. It's not just America. Because us Americans tend to generally only think of America and other Americans. And we're so caught up in like the separateness of Americans, that we don't even think about Africans or Namibians and everyone really?

Ernest: [00:17:03] No, you're absolutely right, man. Yeah. I mean, I think that's intentional in the way that we filmed the show and making sure that everybody is represented as much as possible and that people are, are seen for the human beings that we are, you know. And I think you hit the nail on the head, when you talk about here in the US, we focus so much on



Titans as Teens

our own division as quote unquote, as Americans. That's the interesting thing, isn't it? That there's a recognition that we're all Americans and at the same time, but we're not like those people. You know, and, and it does happen in other countries. It's not just the United States. The difference is, those other countries don't necessarily wave the flag of, you know, greatness and superiority that you see with a lot of Patriots here in the U S

I agree. It's, it's, it's kind of a double-edged sword in a way, but mostly edged towards the Americans.

(laughs)

Brody: [00:18:00] Um, yeah, I mean, I'm curious what, what, what's like one of the things in your experience, traveling that really most surprised you about a different culture that you knew nothing about prior to going?

Ernest: [00:18:10] Oh man, I, I'll say this definitely going to countries that are majority Muslim, like Egypt and Tajikistan. And I say that because going there, even as I like to think of myself as progressive and worldly and sophisticated, there were still times when I was like, should I let them know that I'm American? Or should I kind of be honest about my backgrounds and origin? And when I did that, when I was honest about, you know, being an American guy, visiting, like people were super welcoming, engaging, making jokes, and just, it really was a wonderful experience for me in both of those places.

I recognize that that was my experience, that there are other people from here and other places who could go there and not have that same experience. I know of women who've gone to some of these places and not felt welcome or safe. So, I recognize that that is part of my privilege as a very tall, tall, relatively masculine, English speaking, U S passport holding, highly, formally educated, American male.

Like all of those privileges allow me to move through the world in a way that not everyone gets to do. But owning those aspects of my identity allowed me to have a much more authentic and engaging experience with people. So, I wasn't worried about, oh, who's going to find out that I'm American and then who's going to treat me some kind of way, because I'm American in countries where we're taught that they're our quote unquote enemy, you know. Um, it was just very interesting to go to those places and be very well received.

Brody: [00:19:50] Absolutely. I mean, I know we've talked about a lot of phobias today, but one of the big ones actually like really not talked about at all in America, so Islamophobic.

Ernest: [00:19:58] Sure.

Brody: [00:19:59] And I think going to Muslim countries and being able to experience that and sharing that with other people. Really can kind of break down that barrier of like, oh, those are the guys who did 9/11. No, they're not. Right?



Titans as Teens

Exactly.

Ernest: [00:20:12] Man. And you know, the other thing too, was owning my identity as a gay dude. And that's important because we have to give people the opportunity to show that they are, open-hearted welcoming, engaging human beings. That that's what people want to be anyway, even if they're not able to be that in certain, certain at certain times. But going to Morocco, for example, and meeting guys that I met on a couch surfing, that was how I ended up staying there and meeting this group of Moroccan guys who were super cool, and they had no problems with my sexuality. Now, how much of that is me being a foreigner, as opposed to someone being local with you and also identifying as gay. That's something different, but. Every little bit of engagement, every little opening, I believe helps every little bit counts.

The ocean is made of drops of water, you know. And so, it's, I'm not saying that I can just swoop into a place and all of a sudden be well received and respected. I never know, you know, but my point is the times that I have been, have been the times that I have, even through the fear of something happening, been my most authentic truest self, I've been rewarded with engagement, uh, with people who have been loving towards me.

Brody: [00:21:34] Absolutely. And it's in those moments where you're honest about yourself to yourself and with other people that. Not only do you grow the most, but do you actually learn the most about yourself?

Ernest: [00:21:44] Absolutely. Yes.

Brody: [00:21:45] I think I want to go back now to where you started learning how to travel. And I'm sure you've told this story a lot about, I believe what was the book called? Oh my God. Sorry. Um,

Ernest: [00:21:54] Free Stuff For Kids,

Brody: [00:21:54] Free Stuff For Kids, yeah. Can you tell that story one more time? Just for the audience who hasn't heard it?

Ernest: [00:22:00] No worries. So, I grew up in the south, which meant I was going to church like every other good Southern kid. You know, it wasn't anything crazy or out of the ordinary or, you know, and no disrespect to people who were religious. In my household, I was raised in church. And so, the wife of my preacher would give gifts to some of the kids and she was a teacher herself and she gave me a book called Free Stuff For Kids when I was six or seven years old. And you could get all kinds of toys and knickknacks by sending off to whatever the addresses were.

But I was mostly most interested in the travel information that you could get. If you sent off a pass a postcard. Which do you know what a postcard is?



Titans as Teens

Brody: [00:22:44] Barely. That's like a square, right?

Ernest: [00:22:46] Exactly It's a rectangular piece of cardboard often with a photograph and you would write a note on it, put a stamp on it and put it in the mailbox. And what you would get back with it when you would send information. and send for information to these different tourism offices and convention and visitors bureaus, would be maps and brochures and pamphlets and all kinds of interesting information. Posters, for all these different places around the world.

And I grew up in Jacksonville, Florida, which I, which is kind of like San Jose without San Francisco being close by. It's, uh, the city is actually around the same size. And a lot of the houses look alike. My neighborhood has cinderblock houses, single story, that look a lot like the houses on the west side of San Jose.

And so, growing up in that kind of very middle-class suburban kind of place, you know, the, the most exotic thing we had, it was like a Chinese restaurant. Uh, but, but to get these brochures from places like Singapore and Monaco, South Africa, you know, that's kind of what got me really interested in traveling.

I would also call the 800 number of different airlines and order time tables. Now this was all before the internet. So you had a lot of printed materials that are no longer produced, but they were very interesting things for me, like little books with flight schedules and the names of cities like the Lahore, Harari, uh, it was, you know, that kind of stuff just really stoked my interest. I would, I would go get Rand McNally road atlases is and study those maps just until I was blue in the face. I would carry the encyclopedia around with me or ask my parents to buy me though the, what was it? The World Almanac and Book of Facts, because it would have maps and it would have flags. And I was just so, uh, I don't know, just enthralled with the cultures of the world. You know, when I was a kid growing up in Florida, we go to Disney world. And my favorite of the theme parks was not the Magic Kingdom. It was Epcot because I could go to the different countries. They had the Norway pavilion that the ride now I think is affiliated with Frozen the movie. But back then it was about gnomes and trolls and it was called The Maelstrom, you know, which was just coming from a place that had hurricanes like The Maelstrom, you know, that was very exciting to me. Just to learn about different places and people around the world. And so that's kind of how my interest was started.

Geography was my favorite subject. And one day I was in high school and I remember having seen movies where they had a foreign exchange student coming to visit. And we had a foreign exchange student visit my high school. He was from Estonia, I believe, and was, uh, being hosted by the French teacher at the school.

And I asked my parents if we could host a foreign exchange student and they were like, no. But you can go. And so, I remember one day connecting at the mall at, uh, with the, there



Titans as Teens

was a, just a, uh, a booth from YFU. Youth For Understanding International Exchange. They were advertising their foreign exchange trips.

And I ended up getting the information. I convinced my parents to let me go to Sweden the summer between my junior and senior year of high school. And the reason I went to Sweden was because it was the cheapest of all the countries that you could go to. And it was one of the few that you didn't have to know the local language to visit.

If you wanted to go to Spain or France, you had to study three years of French or Spanish. For Sweden, you didn't have to have any language requirements other than your native English. And so, I ended up going to Sweden the summer in 1994. And, uh, it was a life changing, life forming experience. You know, when I came back my senior year of high school, I finished that and went off to college forever changed and desiring of knowledge and experience out in the world.

Brody: [00:26:55] It's an incredible story. I mean, honestly, I can't think of anything similar to it today that like people, my age could experience. Cause like the things you described, getting all these postcards and the guy blowing leaves outside of my house.

Ernest: [00:27:12] It's okay man, he's working.

Brody: [00:27:14] Yeah. It's fine. This, this like kind of journey into the unknown is what I describe it is the feeling that I bet you got. And these days I kind of feel like you can't have that because of the internet. Right? You can just search anything...

Ernest: [00:27:28] I mean, that that's, that I would say this man. The, there is more information at our fingertips than has ever existed in the history of humankind that we know of, you know. And only 25 years ago, none of this really existed, 30 years ago.

I mean, we had like dial up AOL, but that was just coming into commercial use. You know, that was just something that people were accessing. And certainly, there was not as much information available even on dial up as there is now. And so, yes. I mean, if you wanted to know something, you had to look it up in a book. You had to go to the library. You had to go order that information and you had to wait for it to show up.

And there was this anticipation, this excitement that came with the not knowing, you know. It was, life, I believe at that time, was probably the end of some of the, the intrigue, you know, the adventure that comes with venturing out without having everything laid out in front of you. Like there was no MapQuest, which is a shout out to one of the early Google map, uh, predecessors.

Um, you had to, you had an Atlas. You know, to look up the route before you left the house, or you had to pull over to pull out the map and look at it, you know. And these are things that people no longer really do. We had guidebooks to countries, you know, that talked



Titans as Teens

about information and often that information was a little bit outdated and you had to figure it out.

You know, we had to learn how to research and, and, and we had to open our mouths and ask questions. We had to talk to people. We had to engage with folks because you couldn't get the information on your phone. You actually had to say hello, excuse me. Um, I'm sorry. Um, I don't know where I am, you know, I apologize. I don't speak whatever the local language is. I'm sorry. You know, you had to learn how to be diplomatic. To get the information that you wanted, because it did require you having to engage with somebody that you didn't know. And so, all of those were skills that were honed early on when I was kind of growing up. And I, and I would say probably again at the tail end of that analog lifestyle that I was living on to now. And I, I do kind of see some of those skills falling by the wayside. Because people are accustomed now to just looking on their phones for information. And that's a beautiful thing. However, we don't want to lose the ability to engage with people. We want to use... we want to go off online to get offline.

Brody: [00:30:00] Mm, exactly. And like that also intrigue of speaking to people is something that you've touched on. I remember in your show. And I feel like it's something we've lost these days in travel, at least in my experience. In my experience when, my family travels or at least people I know travel, they don't travel for the culture. They don't travel for the people. They travel for the sites, right? Like, oh, look at this cool waterfall. Oh, it's so cool. But they're just totally ignoring the indigenous people, like right behind them. And I feel like that's something that we've also lost in this digital age.

Absolutely. We were doing it for the 'gram. And to be honest, I maintain a social media presence because it's part of what I do as a journalist, as a storyteller it's required.

Ernest: [00:30:42] But I would not feel that much of a loss if I ended up not being on, on social media for whatever reason. Because to be honest with you, it is the intimate conversations that I have with good friends with people that I may have even just met, but that are not recorded. That are not, uh, you know, performative. That are really just being with each other, that make traveling and living worthwhile for me.

And I know there are a lot of other, a lot of other people that way as well. And we still are out here, and we are showing we're trying to anyway, at least through my show, we're trying to show people that these kinds of relationships can still exist. And we can use technology to stay connected with each other more than we ever could, because while I was growing up the way to stay in contact with people that I'd met on my travels was either by a very expensive, long distance phone call, or a letter that you would write and have to wait for it to go out or be to receive the response.

And now, because we're able to keep everyone on our telephone on our cell phones, uh, like in WhatsApp and everything, I think that's giving us a greater opportunity to stay connected,



Titans as Teens

to stay engaged, to have a call. To have... even now as we are kind of isolated, if you will, on some level because of the pandemic, you know, we can still engage with people and we can engage with more people because we can reach out to more people through technology. But it's not a replacement for one-to-one connection. It's a facilitator of one-to-one connection.

Brody: [00:32:22] Yeah. And something I noticed while watching your show. And I want you to actually confirm if I'm right, is a lot of the people that you talk to, or actually talk to you, seem happy to do so. They wanted to talk to this foreigner. Like it's, it's an interesting thing to them. And it's not this oh, you, that guy from America let's avoid him. Right. Everyone is actually interested in meeting someone they don't know. So, I feel like that's also something people don't really know. Am I, am I correct about that?

Ernest: [00:32:50] No, you're absolutely right, man. I, the thing is. Yes, there is something to be said for kind of this quote, unquote American privilege, in that, because the US has such a strong kind of grasp on the media landscape in the world. Because we, the paradigm still is on American produced shows and films.

There's kind of this star quality that we carry with us wherever we go. Earned or not. Mostly not earned. But it's given to us anyway. And so, people are interested in what we have to say. People are interested in, you know, the way we say things, the way we embody ourselves and how, the way we carry ourselves, how we dress, how we engage in the world. And yes, sometimes the responses are, can be negative, you know, based on how we're embodying ourselves. And I think for me, the key has been humility. You know, I'm not always humble, don't get me wrong. But I try my best to be when I'm visiting some other place. It's, looking people in the eye, it's saying, yes, please. Excuse me. Thank you. It's being, it's showing it. It's again, apologizing for not knowing the local language and trying a few words, but also saying, I'm sorry that I don't know. Do you speak English or? It's showing people that you respect them. You respect their culture. You respect where you are. I think that is one of the keys and getting people to engage.

You know, they think, oh, this is someone who's not from here, but someone who's clearly not, you know, acting like they're better or anything. And I'm not saying people are thinking this consciously, but it's that subconscious kind of calculus that's happening as people are engaging with you, they're sizing you up.

And they're saying, you know, not only is this person respectful, but they're also interesting. Not from here. Let me tell you about my place. People want to tell you about where they are and where they're from. People want to engage. People want to connect with people no matter what. Racists want to connect with people.

They don't know necessarily that they're missing out on the other, connecting with people who they perceive to be on some different level than they are often. Racists, and when I say



Titans as Teens

that, I don't even mean necessarily people in KU Klux Klan uniforms. I also mean people who on some level think that other people are not worthy of life, you know. They still want to connect with other people. They do. Human beings are social animals. And so, I'm saying that to say, what you see in these episodes are people who have, who are at a level of engagement that transcends nationality. It transcends background, it transcends boundaries. They're just excited to be able to engage with someone, and show off, uh, the places that they love.

That's really what it's about. you know? And it's exciting to be able to, to witness that and to be the beneficiary of that and share that with other people

Brody: [00:35:59] And going back a bit to like the American superiority thing. I'm positive, like so positive that tons of people who come from American go to, like, I'd say probably not, they're not going to Africa. They're going to like Europe and they're going to Russia. And all those like general tourist areas, they're acting superior because they think Americans are better. And that attitude translates down to the entire world where everything's like, oh, Americans think they're better. Those guys suck. Right.

Ernest: [00:36:28] You see it a lot. You don't always see it. You know, I'm not going to throw all my, my, uh, my fellow countrymen under the bus, but you do see it a lot. But you, you also see it from other countries as well. The idea though, is, to me, coming from a place of such abundance from a place of, of also such a tragic history, of such epic inequality and discrimination. And from a society that is comprised of immigrants, either forced or otherwise, you know, mostly because we do native Americans, do we still exist and live.

You would think there'd be some level of perspective when it comes to how we engage with other people. Now, I was taught to that perspective by my parents and my community and other people around me, who, when I was growing up, reminded me not to get too big for my britches. You know that I am no better than anyone else and no worse than anyone else.

You know, when you let people get, you give people the opportunity to show you who and how they are. But not everyone has that kind of an understanding of how we're all here together, doing the best that we can. You know,

Brody: [00:37:48] I think that's, in my opinion, largely a failure of the American education system really. Failure to teach history other than Christopher Columbus, George Washington, all those white dudes right.

Ernest: [00:37:59] Well, you know, it's, it's, it's has its use. And that use is to, uh, create people whose focus is not on each other, but whose focus is on acquiring things.

Brody: [00:38:10] I have noticed that it, at least as someone who's going through school right now, as I've said, it's changing slowly, it's changing slowly, but it is changing towards



Titans as Teens

more generalized history of America, not just white man's America. I think that's good obviously. But what

Ernest: [00:38:28] Its slow

Brody: [00:38:29] It's very, so yes. What would you say is like the few things that you wish would be taught in the American education system today?

Ernest: [00:38:36] Well, self-worth. I think, uh, that's really it. That's the number one thing, man. Self-worth value and self-love, and I, on one hand, you, it's easy to say, well, parents should be teaching that at home. And it's true.

However, in the absence of that happening at home, I think. I would love to see that some kind of way. I don't know if it would be infused in every, every course or every home room. I don't know if you guys still have homeroom, but in every homeroom session. I do remember when I was growing up or when I was in high school, there were teachers who tried to give us motivational quotes and, um, get us to think more critically about ourselves and value ourselves more.

Uh, I remember Franklin Smith, he sadly passed on, but he was the peer counseling teacher at my school. And he would always find little nuggets of knowledge that he would impart to us. And most of us were not ready to understand and, and really apply it. But looking back, we see just how important those bits of positivity and reflection were to our understanding of who and whose we are.

And I think that is something that definitely needs to be, kind of, played up or stoked. Because, when you feel value, of who, when you feel valued. When you feel like, you know, your worth. You're less likely to try to take that worth from somebody else. Try to take value from somebody else. When you know, you've already got it in you, you're less likely to cause harm and trauma to someone else, you know?

Brody: [00:40:20] Absolutely. Yeah. We've especially in these right. These days where the mental health statistics are just going up and up and it's depressing and sad that these amounts of people are getting depressed, anxiety, all these kinds of things. And I do think if we could find a way to implement a self-worth in class, I do think that would greatly help, but honestly, the best way I can think of is the way you described. So, I don't know how we can do that

Ernest: [00:40:51] Um I think it, well, you know, obviously we're talking about something that's ideal, right? I would also say maybe some meditation and yoga, to be instituted in the schools. Like, you know, and, and of course all the creative, the arts man, you know, that's what humanity is about.



Titans as Teens

Yes. STEM is important and technology and science and math, of course, you know. But also, history and geography. Those things are important. The engagement of people with each other. Because it's great that you're a scientist, but if you don't know how to have a conversation with someone that is engaging, that is empowering to you, you know, what good is it to be so scientific that you lose your humanity?

You know? And so. All of those realms of human understanding are important. And as a former teacher myself and the son of teachers, you know, for me to hear that the humanities and the arts are some of the first things that are cut in schools, it's it is disappointing

Brody: [00:42:02] it's almost like we're training people to be robots. Right.

Ernest: [00:42:05] Well, and that that's, you know, some people would say that's by design.

Brody: [00:42:10] Hmm. Yeah, that's, it's a very good point and sad now that I think about that.

Ernest: [00:42:15] It is. And, and so to, to then reframe, to reframe we don't, this is where you don't necessarily look to the education system to fix all the problems in the world.

This is where you don't look to even parents to fix all the problems in the world. Because again, everybody's doing the best they can do. It's a call to action for those of us who have a gift, a talent, a skill and ability to engage in that, to be the best that we can be doing, the things that we're most passionate about.

And that's a hard road because often the world, our universe is set up where it is, can be quite challenging for us to align with our passion and purpose in a way that is sustainable and scalable, you know. Often there are people who are very creative, but haven't found the, how to unlock the abundance with that creativity, so they can focus on that creativity. And they end up doing some other job that is soul killing, but it pays the bills, you know. Like, so there's so many, and there are challenges to that. I don't mean to make it seem like it's so easy, but it is essential. It is necessary. And in my experience, I'm realizing that my little stories that I tell, my little TV show that is a mouthpiece or a, a platform for other people to tell their stories, that's part of the work. You know, that again is one of the drops that make up the ocean. And so, in doing so that that's really all I can do.

Brody: [00:43:40] I mean also, I just think you being, you. Who you are is a perfect example for people out there who want to follow their dream and do what they want. Right. Cause you pretty much took nothing and created a TV show then now people can watch. Right.

Ernest: [00:43:56] That's true, man. Thank you. I mean, I did not do it with some large amount of cash on the front end. Absolutely. You know, it was learning how to engage with people in order to find fellow, let's say travelers, who were interested in engaging in the way



Titans as Teens

that I engage with people and interact with people. And they were able to help pull in the resources.

You know, it's working with camera crew, my camera team in Brazil. They're amazing. And they also had faith and trust in the project. And we were doing things with, with great economic uncertainty during much of the production period. And yet we couldn't quit. You know, we were, there would always be some opening that would allow us to move the ball a little bit further down the field.

And eventually we made it to the goal. You know, not necessarily as quickly as we would've liked, but we did. And we created something that I think is amazing and that is helpful to the world, you know? And it's, and, and now we're looking at the next thing, you know, season two of the show, as well as other projects that are centered in helping people feel seen, feel empowered and feel loved, which is really what the work is about.

Brody: [00:45:11] Okay. What are your goals for the next season or your other projects? I'm quite curious, actually,

Ernest: [00:45:15] So thank you for asking. I actually, we're creating a film and television and digital media studio that is focused on BIPOC and LGBT centered stories, that allow that, that some of them are my own stories that I've created myself. Others would be co-productions with other people or adaptations of books and other forms of media. Some of them will be in other languages, Spanish and Zulu and Amharic and Tagalog. Some of them will be, you know, obviously set in places that I've never been to, but the point is to help people get their stories out there. The point is to really provide the opportunity for people to tell fun and enjoyable, but intelligent and impactful stories. Feature films, documentaries, scripted series, docu-series like my own. Video games and VR experiences that are centered on stories that have been ignored up to now, you know. That's, and we won't be the only game in town, just be one of the best of the games in town.

And that's okay too. Like it's, you know, it's, the sky is big enough for every bird and that is something, and that's not mine by the way, this Nigerian saying from my friend Lola Akinmade but it may, it, it still stays with me, you know, it's not a zero-sum game. So, it it's, that's kind of, what I'm most excited about right now is the laying of the groundwork for these other stories.

I'm really excited about the possibility of writing and producing my first feature film series, other projects, you know. So yeah, that's kind of what the focus is, and I'm hesitant to really say more about,

Brody: [00:47:03] Don't worry about it,



Titans as Teens

Ernest: [00:47:04] But, uh, but yeah, you'll, you'll, you know, people, uh, will be. We're going to spread the word soon enough.

Brody: [00:47:11] Great. I think the really cool thing about that kind of area too, is when one person wins, everyone wins technically because everyone has the same goal, which is to spread awareness and love to everyone. So, if one person wins in that area, they might get all the money, but everyone else has their goal.

Ernest: [00:47:29] So, I mean, you know, and the thing is, again, it's teamwork making the dream work, you know. There's enough abundance for all of us as well. Like if we, when, when we are, let's say when a project is lucrative, that allows us to pay people, that allows us to hire people that allows us to keep money as, um, an abundant resource, flowing. You know, that's the exciting thing about paying bills. Quote, unquote, it's not so much that you're spending your money is going out, but it's circulating. And you're allowing other things to happen. You're catalyzing other things.

One of the older sayings is that you're giving employment to some and enjoyment to others. You know, when you've got, when you've got money from a project. And so that's the exciting thing too. It's to be that, uh, that bridge, that facilitator, that conduit for creation. And, uh, it w it took a long time for me to get to this point, to be excited about it and to, to get to where I am, but it's happening at the right time.

There are people who are dealing with health issues with deaths in their family, because of COVID, they're dealing with loved ones, not just family, but of loved ones. Uh, they're dealing with the loss of a job, the loss of an identity that was tied to that job, you know. And it's not to diminish any of that stuff. It's just to say, there's also a great opportunity for, for transformation in the other direction. For transforming, and so it's all, it's all possibly transformation to the greater good. The greater experience. The greater expansion of life into doing, and being who you really want to be, and doing what you really want to do.

This is the, this is where I see great opportunity happening. Even as other things, kind of a melt away. You know, other ways of being and existing are outdated and outmoded, you know. Those things are being are shifting and there's a lot of resistance to that. That's what we see out in the streets. That's what we see in certain parts of the country where people are resistant to the transformation that is happening in the world, because it's scary, you know.

But I've been on the entrepreneur's journey on the producer's journey for four or five years now. So, I'm kind of used to the uncertainty. It doesn't mean that it was enjoyable, but it meant when 2020 started going left, well, I already knew what was left, you know, so it kind of helped me to, to really, to just stay on the surf board a little more than other people. That's all.



Titans as Teens

But it's, you know, it's not been enjoyable, so I don't want to make it seem like life's all about enjoyment. It ain't. It's about, it's about finding though. It's about finding the enjoyment when you can and where you can. And when things aren't enjoyable recognizing, this too shall pass.

Brody: [00:50:25] And, you know, it's that thing through great suffering comes great change.

Ernest: [00:50:29] A hundred percent. And it's there. I, I sense momentum behind the projects that I'm putting together right now that I'm putting together with amazing people. You know, I'm not doing anything on my own at all. And that's another great myth that I feel like it's being destroyed right now, especially in the American psyche that the myth of independence and pulling us ourselves up by our bootstraps. That was never a thing. Ever. Because a lot of people who think they're self-made, they were already set up for that by other people in their lives.

And other people gave them a green light, gave them a thumbs up, gave them a chance, gave them an opportunity. You know, it's we live in society. That's the only way.

Brody: [00:51:14] Exactly. It's like that song by White Snake. Here I Go Again On My Own or whatever. It, everyone wants to be the lone wolf, you know, but you can't, it's not possible. No one succeeds by themselves.

Ernest: [00:51:26] Exactly. And to succeed at what, you know, what are you succeeding at by yourself when you're by yourself? You know what I mean? Like exactly. Being by yourself. And are you happy with that? Like that's and it doesn't mean that there are not times when we have to step in and and shoot our shot. You know, that's not what it means.

It doesn't mean it's not absolving people of their responsibility. Everybody, we all have our responsibility, but it's our responsibility within the greater constellation, you know, within the universe. And that's where, again, the mistake is, oh, I did it myself. You need to do it yourself. No, because you didn't do it yourself.

You know, it's recognizing that you were helped. And that's okay. There's nothing wrong with getting help. There's nothing wrong with engaging and with working as a team. That's actually, it is admirable, especially if that team is made up of people that you don't necessarily have a natural affinity with, you know, that's, that's the thing. Like, again, people think it's all, you know, it's got to feel right all the time. It often doesn't feel right.

Brody: [00:52:33] Yeah. It's not always sunshine and rainbows.

Ernest: [00:52:35] It is not. always sunshine and rainbows, it's mostly not.

Brody: [00:52:40] I mean, you got to get through the storm to get to the rainbow,



Titans as Teens

Ernest: [00:52:43] But think about this though, too. Like, well, I don't know, you know, I think, uh, aside from the unfortunate forest fires and earthquakes that happened in Northern California and California generally has kind of a benign climate, if you will.

I'm saying that to say, I grew up in Florida, which is quite tempestuous, you know, you before a storm, it would be this, electric charge in the air. You know, you would see these big clouds, you would see the lightning strike and you would just kind of feel this anticipation of something big and powerful about to happen.

Like, just because it's a storm doesn't mean it has to be scary. It can be exhilarating, you know, and that too is part of just this life that we're living, you know. Sunshine and rainbows are very nice. Thunder storms are also nice. To me, you know, and, and that, you know, to me is kind of something that I think once people kind of learn how to implement or apply that to their lives. Cause it's, it's great to say it. It's great to create the image of it, you know, but it's what does that mean on the day to day? It means sometimes it's going to suck, you know, but like the rainbows and sunshine and the storms, they all pass. And the next thing is coming. Yeah.

Brody: [00:54:08] There's no power in stagnation. You always have to be growing and moving.

Ernest: [00:54:12] Well, you will grow and move. So that's the thing. Like when you, if you're, if you're being stagnant, it's going to feel something's going to feel off. And you'll be spurred to move anyway. So, it'll happen naturally. The thing is, it won't be necessarily, it won't feel like constant movement. You know, there's times that that's where we come with another, like earthquake metaphor, you know, like the Earth's crust is always in motion. But there are things that kind of, it gets caught on these snags. You know what I mean? And so, it may appear to be stagnant and then, boom, you've got a bigger earthquake that's happened because there's been pressure that's been built up. So as beings, we are constantly expanding. There are times when it feels like stagnation, but that's because it didn't start off feeling like stagnation. You know what I mean? It started off feeling like the right thing and then it became comfort and then it became, well, it was exciting at first, then it became comfortable. Then it became stagnation because your energy like expanding, you know? And so, you can either be very attuned to it and constantly kind of, you know, let's say pivoting and some of that might be from as a result of trauma, when you have a hard time sitting still, you know, another thing. So, it's not to say that people who are constantly pivoting have it figured out, nobody has it figured out really. But you, but you can be a little bit attuned to it and kind of go with the flow a little bit more, or you can be resistant to it, but you're going to go anyway. You're going to be, you know, you can either, do it yourself, or you can be thrown into whatever the next thing is.



Titans as Teens

Brody: [00:55:52] Yeah, it makes sense. I guess. Geez. I never thought of it that way. That's really cool.

Ernest: [00:55:56] Sometimes I just talk,

Brody: [00:55:58] That's literally the point. It's a podcast.

Ernest: [00:56:03] Yes. And that's what I, that's what I mean when I say like, nobody's got it figured out, you know. We've got areas of expertise because we've had a lot of trial and error, a lot of experience and there's things that we feel like, okay, we kind of understand how this goes. And then boom, there'll be some other variable that gets thrown in there that creates a little bit of chaos, you know?

And it's getting through that in a way that doesn't derail you. That is that's where the, the, the skills come in to play, you know. And a lot of those skills are, are emotional. A lot of those skills are mental, and you know that mental toughness that sometimes they talk about and all these other podcasts and everything, it's recognizing that like, you're going to be all right. You know what I mean. Even when you're thrown about from side to side, like it's going to be all right one way or the other, you know, and that kind of thing is hard sometimes just to sometimes really sit with and be at peace with when you've got a lot of turmoil in life.

Brody: [00:57:00] Absolutely human beings are a lot stronger on the inside than they are on the out.

I mean,

Ernest: [00:57:05] man, but you know what we are, we're made of strong stuff. We're made of Stardust. So, you know, it's when you recognize that, then maybe you let stuff, you know, you can brush things off a bit easier. And I'm saying that, you know, as someone who sometimes has a hard time brushing things off.

Brody: [00:57:25] Yeah. I guess the last question I have for you is this is probably a hard one and you might've already said it. But out of all the things you've learned, traveling, outside of traveling, just living, what's the thing that you've learned that has made the greatest impact on your life in general. Be it negative or positive.

Ernest: [00:57:45] That's easy actually to answer. There's a song called Nature Boy. And the last lines are: "The greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return." And I think the order of that is important because we're often trying to give love to someone else to something else outside of ourselves.

But what we've struggled, what we tend to struggle with is the being loved in return part. And that, to me, no matter what has happened in my life, no matter where I've been, no



Titans as Teens

matter where I end up going, it is to be okay with who and how I am at all times. Even when I feel like there's times that I've, you know, could have done better, let's say, you know. If I could have, though I would have. And loving yourself is saying it's all right, baby.

Brody: [00:58:53] I mean, if you don't love yourself, no one else will.

Ernest: [00:58:55] Uh, I don't know if I believe that necessarily because, and I'm saying that just because I've had people...

Brody: [00:59:03] It's not an ultimatum.

Ernest: [00:59:05] Right. And that, that's what I was going to say. If you don't love yourself, you know, they do say Ru Paul says, how can you love anybody else? I don't think it's a, an either or, you know what I mean?

Um, because I know I've had people in my life who have loved me at times that I've hated myself. You know, again, I was 365 pounds in high school. I had a lot of, self-loathing a lot of self-hatred that was carried with me into my thirties. You know, that just in, in, in showed up in ways that it still shows up now, you know, it's still, some of that still shows up with regard to having body dysmorphia, having all kinds of insecurities that I didn't even know that I had, you know. And it's loving those too.

It's looking at where those have shown me empathy, where those have shown me humility, where those have really given me the opportunity to, to romance myself, to be like, you know what, like this is, I'm gonna give myself some self-love right now. And it can be as simple as a movie or a good date with somebody or whatever.

But also, it's in giving myself the space to be a mess, giving myself the space to cry, giving myself the space to yell and hate something or somebody. And also, again, recognizing like I'm not bound by any of those things. You know what I mean?

And so, it's also recognizing that there are going to be people who will be loving you even when you're not loving yourself. And that the universe has your back, you know. So back to just the concept of the greatest thing you'll ever learn is just to love and be loved in return. Like I, it's so powerful and I want everybody to know what that feels like. Everyone in the world needs to know what being loved feels like. Because when you do that, you will live your life seeking to be back in that state.

Brody: [01:01:16] Ernest White II. Thank you so much for listening to this episode of Titans As Teens.

If you want to learn more about the podcast or other episodes, visit [TitansAsTeens.com](https://titansasteens.com) for tons of information and further reading. And make sure to follow on whatever platform you're listening on. Thanks for listening.



Titans as Teens