



Titans as Teens

Transcript: Sunniva Sorby Episode 16

The podcast is here:

<https://www.titansasteens.com/sunniva-sorby-expeditioner--citizen-scientist/>

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 Arctic Explorer Sunniva Sorby.

Sunniva: [00:00:25] A lesson I learned on the expedition to the south pole and learned this skiing across Greenland and on anything I've done where I've been sick or I've been injured, or I just somehow lost a little something along the way. I have not given myself the ability to think that quitting was an option.

Because the second you think quitting is an option. Guess what you'll do? You'll quit. But if, if that's not an option for you, it's amazing what we're capable of.

Brody: [00:00:56] If I had to use one word to describe Sunniva, it would probably be metal. Sunniva spends the majority of her time in some of the harshest conditions known, in order to collect research.

Sunniva's story is both hilarious and inspiring. Sunniva has some fascinating thoughts and advice from the thing she learned while in the Arctic. I really hope you enjoy listening to her as much as I did. So, without further ado, my conversation with Sunniva Sorby.

It's, it's really fascinating how these days, a lot of people think the profession of Explorer or kind of person who goes into the wilderness and does cool shit is dead, but it's obviously not. Because here you are, and I'd say you're an explorer, you do that kind of. Um, so I'd like to trace your kind of path to see how you got to where you were today, starting in high school.

Sunniva: [00:01:46] Oh boy. And, um, it's, I'll just tell you right out of the gate that at the age of 30, which is probably feels like a lifetime away for you, but at the age of 30, I became an Explorer when I went to the south pole. But before then I had this idea that it was this mystical world that only a select few people lived in. And certainly not me, you know? So it was, it's just a, an image and a vision of people, like you just said that are probably very bearded, um, mustached, uh, grizzly looking clothing, standing somewhere planting of a flag or beating their chest. And usually a man. And not a woman. So, it's like, I'm, I'm glad I'm around to defy and demystify the image of that. Because believe it or not, I really, I think



Titans as Teens

that everybody has an exploratory part of them inside their being. I think that we're all, we've gone so far away from that in our life, because everything has become so automated.

But we all, I think most of us really yearn for that, get hunt would, um, you know, hunt and gathering instinct that our ancestors had. So, I don't know what happened to me when I was young, to be honest, but, uh, um, I, I knew growing up that I was different, and I don't mean different as in odd or weird. I just knew that I was here for a reason. And I could not put my finger on it for a really long time.

But I've always been very introspective, read a lot of books on psychology and the human potential. And I've always been super interested in people who, men and women, regardless of age or geographic background, just why do some people take risks and push themselves and other don't. I've been, I've been so fascinated by that very question from, from when I was little.

When I was 10, I dreamt of going to the moon and I wrote a letter to NASA when I was in school because the teacher said, um, they're not really accepting civilians right now, but she encouraged me to write a little letter to NASA. So, I did, and I got a very nice, polite form letter back saying: stay in school and maybe someday they will send a civilian in space. So, I stayed in school and I kept the dream of going somewhere far away, alive in my mind. It was just always this desire to want to like, peek around the edge of something. Peak over the top of something. Peak underneath something and really discover what I'm made of, and what I need to live, as, as a, as a person. So, growing up and, and going to high school, I mean, I follow the path, like a lot of people did. I had to go to school, I went to school. I hated it. I loved it. I made great friends, Kamala Harris. She went to the same high school I did in Montreal.

Brody: [00:04:43] Wow, that's incredible

Sunniva: [00:04:45] Yeah. Well, although I had never met her, but we went to the same high school. I think when I, when I applied for college, I just remember being so confused about what I wanted to do and I, and I abhorred I disliked, needing to fit into some sort of a box. Or some sort of a career path, because it just has never been me.

In school, and I went to a private girl school in Montreal, and we worked, we wore tunics, you know, black and white, um, white shirt, black navy tunic with navy socks, uh, had to be up to your below your knees. And I never wore those navy socks. I always wore my gym socks. So, I, I tried really hard to maintain a certain sense of my own identity, without being a complete rebel, but just, you know, I love gym more than I loved biology at the time.

So I was, I was, um, always athletic and engaged in sports. I think that the key thing for me in high school was maintaining my curiosity, was really making sure that, I more than wanting



Titans as Teens

to grow up and know the answer for things, I wanted to, I wanted to probe the questions. I wanted to live the questions and I've always been like, I hope that makes sense.

Brody: [00:06:07] It does kind of like not wanting to just follow what the man says, kind of thing. Just not going to job. You're like, okay, do this this hour this way. Do you want to kind of tell me if I'm wrong, also find your own way to do things and not even find your own way to do it. but choose what to do. In that kind of way.

Sunniva: [00:06:29] Exactly, mean, I really, that you're spot on with that Brody. And I, I mean, I feel like we're the architects of our own life. And it gives us tremendous power, but often, especially growing up, we feel like we have to follow what other people say we should do. And I think people just wish us well, especially our parents, especially administrators and you know, our role models around us.

But I think it's so important, and it's always been super important to me to pursue what I passionately love. And that's often not popular. Because, you know, if you follow your path of passion, regardless of your age, somebody will pop your bubble. Because God forbid, we should do what we love. You know, we should sometimes just do what we need to do.

And, and I think that I have been, um, someone who has really groomed the, do what you love part of me. And I get inspiration from my father in that department. When I was 10, he was out at sea. He was a captain on an oil tanker, and he was gone all the time. And he would come back after six months and he would say, okay, what have you done? Where are you going? And show me, show me the results. You know, he was very much a list-maker. And all that being said, he had a part of him that was very much about the sea, the openness, the calling. That yearning. That into the wild.

Brody: [00:07:57] Yeah, I like that. Every time someone, who's done, that kind of thing describes it. Like. You've probably felt this too it just like, sounds like, holy shit. I want to do that. Like now.

Sunniva: [00:08:12] Yes, absolutely. I mean, I have, I have had this like silent envy about so many people growing up that I just thought were so untouchable, like an Explorer. And I, I wanted to turn that around. When I started doing some really hardcore stuff out there, , I wanted to go out there and shine a light, not on myself, but I wanted to shine a light, turn all the attention on me, to other people to say, you know what? I am no different from you. The only difference is that I just made a choice to do this very thing.

It's like that great quote by Henry Ford. It's just, um, it goes like this. Whether you think you can, or you think you can't, you're right.

Brody: [00:08:57] I've heard that one. It's a good one.

Sunniva: [00:08:59] I like it.



Titans as Teens

Brody: [00:09:00] What this is actually like surprisingly reminding me of is other people that I've talked to on this podcast. Um, mostly entrepreneurs and investors and businessmen, are saying the exact same things as you, except pertaining to their fields. And I'm like, what? And like, as we're speaking, I'm kind of thinking, being like, okay, okay. \

Sunniva: [00:09:23] Wow. I'm going to have to do a little homework and listen to your other podcasts, because I it's fascinating to me that there is that shared little gene or thread if you will, you know, to push the push ...

Brody: [00:09:37] Not wanting to not, not, not follow what everyone else is doing and take your own route kind of way. A lot of the people I spoke to, they dropped out of college to go work on their company or something. And yeah. Yeah. What did you do in college? Did you, I assume you didn't drop out. Cause you said you only started exploring when you were 30.

Sunniva: [00:09:58] I was exploring before I was 30, but I was in the minor leagues before I was 30. With trips and being a guide and all of that great stuff.

But I, um, I went to school in Canada. I was born in Norway and I grew up in Montreal. My parents immigrated from Norway to Canada when I was a year old. And I'm bilingual, can speak French and English and actually trilingual, because I can speak Norwegian. And went to high school there. And then I went on to, um, Champlain college and Bishop's university.

And humanities and law and economics were the three and, and sports. I was, uh, I, I became the intermural Athlete of the Year, which means you are a master of nothing, and you know, and really good at everything. That's what that means.

Brody: [00:10:44] What sport did you do?

Sunniva: [00:10:45] I played everything. Yeah. Soccer. I played field hockey. I played basketball with the Happy Hoopers, just because I love the name. Um, I played tennis. That was my big dream growing up was to go to Wimbledon. And I was, I, I, and I left actually when I was 19 to move to California to play tennis professional.

Brody: [00:11:06] Wow.

Sunniva: [00:11:06] And did that at the John Wayne tennis club. And that's a sordid part of my past but went there with a boyfriend at the time. And that was not so so good. And went back to Canada to finish my degree.

Brody: [00:11:19] It's crazy how, like, even the fact that you were able to go do that in California. And I assume have moderate success or else you wouldn't have done it.

Sunniva: [00:11:29] Yeah.



Titans as Teens

Brody: [00:11:30] But even to be able to just turn around and then pretty much flip your whole life around, I'd say being an Explorer in the Arctic is pretty much the polar opposite of being a tennis player.

Sunniva: [00:11:40] Absolutely. It's so strange, you know, you're when you're, when you're just saying it like that. I'm thinking how, how many risks I've taken in my life. Like a lot. And ones that maybe have made a lot of people nervous, especially in my family, but ones that I will never, ever regret because I've, I've been able to actually chase the dream. You know, and I think the important thing is that you don't always fulfill all your dreams, but you have to, you have to, you have to chase them. You know.

I went back, I was invited to my high school in Montreal to speak at career day. And, um, I was horrified. Because I read, I read the lineup of people, that of women that were going to go, and they'd all been in a career for like 23 years, or maybe only had two careers and they were an expert in this, an expert in that.

And I thought, what could I possibly share with these girls that would be valuable? And that's just that little niggling question you have, you know, that insecurity and doubt that just comes flying forward, sometimes, that I... It's like that little thing on my shoulder and I go, you know what? I have really no time for you to visit me right now, if you need to go away.

And so, when I get rid of that insecurity, what does show up is that, you know what? I have a ton of experience to share with these students. And what I shared was how important it was in today's world to be an expert at many things. I mean, we no longer live in a world where you can just follow one path and that's going to serve you to the end of your life.

Not a chance. So, we have to be very resilient. We have to be very inventive. We have to be very courageous. We have to be bold and courageous. We have to be willing to take calculated risks. And we have to be willing to always be humble, you know, in the face of this sort of adversity, when the door closes. Just punch it down. So, I, what I shared with them is that there is no, there is nothing out there that's not possible. Absolutely not a thing. I think that the difference between me and someone doing what I just did now, uh, in the Arctic is, the decision

Brody: [00:13:56] I like that. It really reminds me of some quote from a very good book and people who take risks and risk-takers, risk-takers occupy two spaces in society, the very bottom, and the very top. There's no in-between. And the reason for that is once you take a risk, I mean, obviously you succeed or you fail, but the thing is, the reason they're also at the top is because they keep trying. And eventually they succeed, and they get to the top. So, the people at the bottoms are just the one who haven't succeeded yet.



Titans as Teens

Sunniva: [00:14:26] Yeah, no, very good point. And that's so true. It's like you, when you have a long way to fall, when you go, when you go high. And then when you're way down there, you also know that there's light above it. You know, when you're sitting in that little pit of darkness.

Brody: [00:14:42] Yeah. So, when you were doing kind of small time Explorer jobs, um, guiding and leading, as you said, what was the breaking point to break into, as you said, big time exploring or whatever.

I don't really know the terminology.

Sunniva: [00:14:59] No great question. Um, and I'll explain it a little bit. I was managing an outdoor store in Southern California called Adventure 16, and I was, um, an assistant, um, lead for rock climbing. I was teaching people how to use a map and compass, which people don't use any more it's GPS.

I was teaching winter camping. I was leading, you know, backpacking classes up in the Sierra, uh, to Mount Whitney and Joshua Tree and places like that. And I, I had a VW bus, a 74 Westphalia pop-up, uh, camper, which I loved. And my best friend, John Allan and I, um, lived in that thing for four months, and trained together, worked together and did it just, we were guiding together, had so much fun. And it was a time. It was, it was a time in my life where I really built community around outdoors people. And our world became so much, a part of, no, I said that wrong. Our world was really all about, all of us. You know, the community built around the activities we were involved in and teaching other people how to be self-sufficient in the outdoors.

And then I, I, uh, my roommate at the time, who was an editor for a newspaper, came home and said, I just interviewed the most amazing woman for this, for this publication. And she's going to lead a team of women across Antarctica. And I was like, what? You're kidding. She goes, no, oh, they're planning a four-and-a-half-month ski trip hauling a hundred-pound sleds each, um, across Antarctica. Is the first ever women's team. And I thought, wow, I was so, oh, impressed that women were doing this. And I had no, like, there was no element in my being that identified with the actual doing.

And then, um, a couple of days later, she came back home and said, I reached out to Ann Bancroft, the, the leader of that expedition to get a few photos for the article. And she told me that one of the team members dropped out, and they're looking for a fourth. And Brody in that moment, and I can't even explain what happened, except that, those words went through me like at lightning. And I felt that I was that fourth person. And I was horrified at my thought initially because of what that meant. And I was also a little embarrassed, so I never said anything to anybody for weeks.



Titans as Teens

And then I finally asked my friend, Deborah, who was a musician and was the editor of this paper. I said, I want Ann Bancroft's phone number. I want to call her, and I want to tell her that I'd like to support them with equipment through the store, or just somehow help them.

And that's how it started, was just me really identifying with the bold risk they were taking by stepping out of their comfort zone, and wanting somehow to play a role or, or, or, you know, make some sort of contribution. And it started with a phone call and it led them to a two-and-a-half-hour conversation, which led into them buying me a ticket to fly to Minnesota, where the head office was. Interviewing with the team for three and a half days. And for the first time, like pulling out everything that was inside me. Like self-inventory, who are you? Who are you not? What are your strengths? What are your weaknesses. Be really, you know. complete inventory of an honest inventory, not just, well, I think I'm really good at this, but you're not really good at it.

I mean, so when I say minor league, I went from a world where you can make mistakes and going to Antarctica, you're going into the major league and you're going to a world where, there's no more testing.

Brody: [00:18:58] You make a mistake, you're dead,

Sunniva: [00:18:59] Make a mistake and you could be dead. And I almost died on that expedition. Um, I was so sick.

Brody: [00:19:04] That's honestly amazing to me that just not to use the word coincidence, but like the sheer chance of that kind of string of events happening. It's amazing, to be honest.

Sunniva: [00:19:17] You use the word coincidence. I'm going to offer up another word for what, um, synchronicity, which is a meaningful coincidence.

And I think, and I really believe, and maybe, and I don't want to sound a little bit too far out there, but I have, I have become a student of energy. Just studying how, how, if you work with intention with your heart, your mind, and your spirit, and your soul. And you're, you're, you're really aligned on something. Nothing gets in your way. And you know, things show up. People show up. Resources show up. And I have put that to the test in my life many times. And I'm, I'm just, it sometimes scares me that, when I decide to do something, it often it's at the expense of something else, of course. But when you decide to do something, all things sort of fold into support that, that idea or that thing.

And it's very powerful.

Brody: [00:20:21] I'm not sure if this is correct, but I've noticed that that kind of feeling of energy and connectedness, happens a lot more when you're in a nature setting, per se. My



Titans as Teens

example for this. I went on a month-long backpacking trip with NOLs, if you're familiar with them.

Sunniva: [00:20:39] Absolutely, yeah.

Brody: [00:20:41] Yeah, last summer. And that, that kind of feeling you get it pretty much the entire time until you. And then it's still there once you leave. Just not as strong, that's personally my experience. And so, I get what, you're saying. I'm not sure people listening will... .

Sunniva: [00:20:55] No, I think, I think people listening will understand this because you make great sense.

One of the things that I've had a lot of time to reflect on, because I've been out in the quote unquote wilderness for a year with zero distraction. Hundred and, um, a hundred miles away from the nearest neighbor, polar bears as our neighbors, 53 polar bear encounters with nothing but wildlife, ice and light.

And yeah, you are spot on when you say that when you're in the natural world, in that nature setting, you're elevated and you're more open. I think that the key distinction to make between, being in a city and being out in nature, is, if we're receivers for things, we are so much more open to receive, even the inner voice that we have inside us, when we're out there without distraction.

And that's the beauty of being in the wilderness. Isn't it is you have time to reflect, you have time to melt into the landscape. You have time to actually, really listen to yourself and the voices in your head. You either, you like them or you're adult, but they're in your head. And you have time to really be creative. Because you have to make stuff up.

And I think that's one of the gifts of being in, in, uh, out there. And I'm so happy to hear you went on a NOLs course because, Hilde and I, on our expedition in the Arctic, we, we talk a lot about expedition behavior.

Brody: [00:22:25] Yeah, exactly. I think you hit it like directly on nail on the hammer, head, whatever. Uh, when, when you talked about distraction, I mean, really, there's not a difference between where I am and where you were physically, I guess you could say. Except for the distraction. Like here I have my phone, I have the computer in front of me. I have all my friends just doing random things. But over there in the wilderness, it's the same ground. It's the same earth. You don't have those other things distracting you.

And another thing not to ramble, that you said that like really, really struck me earlier, was when you were talking about with your first expedition, you had to do three-and-a-half-day training or not training, but like analysis to see what your character was truly like. And it's

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.

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because in the wilderness you have to be able to manage it. Right. You have to have the right character for it. And your real character per se is just exposed.

Sunniva: [00:23:33] Absolutely

Brody: [00:23:34] ripped away of everything else.

Sunniva: [00:23:36] Yeah, yeah. Right, right on Brody. And you know, you just made me think about, I don't know if you have heard of Joseph Campbell?

Brody: [00:23:43] Yes

Sunniva: [00:23:44] It's kind of hard to read his stuff, some of it, but, um, the Hero's Journey, but I won't go into it except to say that. When I was on that expedition to the south pole, my ego was very involved. I wanted to prove that I could do it. I wanted to prove that I could haul a 200-pound sled in minus 35 degrees Celsius temperatures for two and a half months. And I did it. I almost broke myself doing it, but I, and that's ego taking you to the door.

What happens on longer trips than you did. And, and I, and I know. And I can see it in your eyes right now. You have, you have a long trip in you. And it's the kind of trip that, that sort of can, can paint masterpieces or create symphonies. You know what I mean? And just like make really powerful things or write a novel or, I mean, when you're out there for a long time, who you are as a person has no place to hide.

And so, um, you realize really quickly as I'm sure you did on your NOLS course that there's no room for your ego to show up. There's really only room for the real Brody or the real Sunniva

Brody: [00:24:58] Well, yeah, I can give you my experience, which is honestly a lot less interesting for the viewers, but whatever. Um, on my NOLs trip with 11 other people, it was fascinating, honestly, just to see their personalities that they put up kind of dissolve as time went on, into like who they really were underneath. And what I noticed, I, same thing honestly, happened to me. And by the end of the trip, how I changed was I was reading constantly. I'd brought in my Kindle and pretty much any chance I got, I was just reading it. So that, that was like this thirst for knowledge is what I noticed.

Sunniva: [00:25:35] That's fantastic. Um, reading has been one of my saviors this past year. Can you tell me one of, one of the books you read?

Brody: [00:25:41] Bit hard to remember, it was last year. I'm bending over cause of my bookshelf right here. Uh, I read a lot of fantasy.

Sunniva: [00:25:48] Yeah.

Brody: [00:25:49] But also, um, one of the books that really stuck out to me, was Seven Habits, Seven Habits of Highly Effective People by Stephen Covey. I believe



Titans as Teens

Sunniva: [00:26:00] That's a great book. Okay. Um, I want you to read Man's Search For Meaning Viktor Frankl.

Brody: [00:26:06] I have actually, I read that.

Sunniva: [00:26:08] I love that read. Maybe add to your list West With The Night by Beryl Markham,

Brody: [00:26:13] Ok, will do.

Sunniva: [00:26:13] She was an African bush pilot and her writing is so amazing. And she was like a pioneer, uh, at her time and just, it's a really good book.

Brody: [00:26:23] Okay. I feel like I need to get a bit more on track because we got really, really sidetrack there just because we both kind of got caught up talking to each other, which is honestly great because that's the point, but

Sunniva: [00:26:34] no, absolutely.

Brody: [00:26:35] Um, so going back to your experience and the Arctic. How do you stay sane being by yourself? Hmm with one other person, I believe it was for nine months.

Sunniva: [00:26:49] Um, that is a very, very, uh, good question. And actually, we were there for 12 months. We extended our state because of COVID. But we, you know, what routine was, I'll just back up. Routine was so important for us obviously.

And, um, but what was really important for us was communication. Um, and doing things together. We could not go outside by ourselves because of the polar bear danger. We always went outside with, uh, our shotguns when we were on hikes. And then when we were going for runs, we always had our signal flare strapped on our belt behind us.

And so, there's a certain degree of trust to that you have to have in that person that you're with. But there's also means that you're living on top of each other. And you, you almost, you have almost zero space, you know? So, we, we had, um, a couple of people that we hired before we left. They actually volunteered to help us, that were, that were coaches for us on interpersonal communication.

Because, you know, even though I'm, I consider myself to be evolved and wise, and I still have a four-year-old in me and she'll never leave. And, uh, Hilde also has the same thing. It's like that little four-year-old shows up and she doesn't really throw it, throw a tantrum, but she does get upset or even, you know, hurt, by comments or things like that.

So, we, we made a pact. Because our space was 215 square feet. Uninsulated trapper's cabin with no running water, no electricity. So, it's just, you're, you're living a really tough lifestyle.



Titans as Teens

You're chopping wood for heat. You're collecting water for dishes for you know, washing your hair for having a sponge bath.

So it was, it was a really tough life, um, for us. But it was possible for us to have joy in it and to have a lot of fun doing it because we liked each other. And I think there's a real difference between loving somebody and liking somebody. I, when I say like, uh, because I like Hilde and she likes me, it means that I really like who she is as a person and how she shows up in the world and vice versa.

So, we trusted that we both had each other's back, you know, because safety was a big thing for us all the time. We made sure to communicate early on, like one of the coaches said to us, you know, when someone says something that you either agree with or disagree with your, your, uh, your, your desire sometimes whether you can control it or not is to hop on the train and add fuel to the fire. And then the conversation or the, you know, that thing escalates, and it becomes so big that you can argue about it. And it's pointless. And so, she said, sometimes you just need to let the train pass. And so, what we practiced for nine months in earnest was to let the train pass.

When we each felt like hopping on each other's bandwagon, because we disagreed about something. And we try to be very good listeners for each other. Instead of needing to agree on everything. Just simply holding space for that person to share a viewpoint that, you know, I don't really agree with, but I'm glad I hear your viewpoint.

We, we laughed a lot. We trained, I even have my bag here with me with Undersun fitness bands, it's a a bag of orange bends. And we worked out two videos from James Grange um, All these videos. He's in Florida. He sent us all the clips in advance, and we worked out six days a week with these bands.

And we did pull-ups. We had a pull up bar inside the hut. We had a gymnastic rings. We had a slack line. We kept ourselves strong and fit. We did yoga. Um, so the routine was absolutely critical for us. Laughter was critical. Celebration, you know, we're not, you know, we're not in a place where we can go somewhere and buy Christmas decorations, you know. It's like, or Halloween or Thanksgiving, or, um, Thanksgiving's one of my favorite holidays, but we didn't have the, or Easter, the ability we have to think about all this in advance.

You know, holding space and really celebrating in, in a, in an authentic way. These holidays that we were so far away from, was golden for us. And because I'm Canadian, even though I was born in Norway and Hilde's Norwegian, we actually got to learn so much about each other's traditions. Because I let her bake her cookies, you know, and do her little thing. And then, and, and, and I would just tell her for the Canadian Thanksgiving, just, uh, make a Turkey, although we didn't have a Turkey. And just try to make a dinner that resembled Thanksgiving and why that was important to me. So, we worked really hard at it. We showed



Titans as Teens

up every day with the, the. door from Bamsebu cracked wide open, um, to the wilderness landscape of the Arctic Tundra.

And it was an invitation for us to be fully present and alive. And, and we, we were every day, I don't think I've ever been more alive in my life.

Brody: [00:32:19] What happens when the days you weren't, how did you keep yourself going?

Sunniva: [00:32:23] I, um, I was really tired for a long time. There was, there's something up there called the polar night. And that's when the sun dips seven degrees below the horizon. And it doesn't show up again for another three months. And, uh, what happens is you're in 24, 7 darkness for three months and there's no street lights around us. I've never experienced the darkness like that. And I had a little bit of a hard time navigating that because you're, you can only light your world with your headlamp or your handheld torch that you've got with lumens that that could stretch at, um, maybe a quarter of a mile.

And, and there, I read a lot. I wrote a lot. I, um, photography is a, is a passion of mine. So, both of us went outside, even though it was minus 34 degrees and took pictures of the Northern lights. And we were collecting these images for NASA, and that was, um, that's been quite somethings. And we were also were the first, you know, rocket citizen scientists for NASA, because we were able to record a rocket launch where they released some barium gases that interacted with the, the gap, the regular gases and magnetism from the Aurora, just to see how it moves.

And so, um, I kept busy even on hard days by I kept them by my routine. I did not let myself sleep in too long. I just didn't let up... Because then it's so easy to fall into a funk.

Brody: [00:33:57] Yeah. Yeah. That, that sort of dull kind of feeling that you get when you're not doing anything and you know, I'm still kind of shocked.

Sunniva: [00:34:05] No, you know what, that, the thing that is so valuable, a lesson I learned on the expedition to the south pole and. learned this skiing across Greenland. And on anything I've done where I've been sick or I've been injured, or I just somehow lost a little something along the way. Is I have not given myself the ability to think that quitting was an option. Because the second you think quitting is an option. Guess what? You'll do.

Brody: [00:34:34] Quit.

Sunniva: [00:34:35] You'll quit. But if, if that's not an option for you, uh, it's amazing, uh, what we're capable of, pretty amazing.

Brody: [00:34:43] You know, actually now that you say that I can absolutely relate that to me as a runner as well. I do cross country. And especially in training, I haven't noticed this in

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races because there's that idea you can't quit. It's the race. But in training, as soon as that idea pops, you're going to be like, man, I'm kind of tired. Maybe I should just stop for a minute. You are 10 times more likely to stop than if you didn't have that thought.

Sunniva: [00:35:11] So tempting

Brody: [00:35:13] it's magnifying as well. The more you think about it.

Sunniva: [00:35:16] Yeah. It's like what you think about expands. I had a night where we were out. We, we walked every day, even in the polar night. And we wear these snowmobile suits. So, it's uh, clothing is 20 weighs, 20 pounds. So, you walk so slow because your, your layers, your clothing, your boots, you're wearing moon boots, everything feels so heavy. So that has an impact on you mentally, too, because you're, you feel so slow.

And we were out walking and. I had both a headlamp, but also a really, um, bright torch. And I had a moment where I just completely lost it. And I said, Hilde I lost the satellite phone. And she's like, are you sure? And I yelled and she had a GoPro on and recorded the whole thing, which I'm so embarrassed about because I yelled at her.

I said, yes, I'm absolutely positive, I lost it. And I was horrified Brody because that satellite phone, we had a, um, we had a Thales Mission Link device outside our hut for, for satellite Wi-Fi. Uh, which is so expensive, but we also had a handheld satellite phone and losing that loses our connection, anytime we're out doing anything outside of the hut. So. My whole world came crashing down, when I realized I had lost it. And she, because I was panicking in the dark and I'm, I never, I've never done that. And she goes, are you sure? And I yelled. I said, I'm absolutely sure. And then she, I said, I keep it up here in my jacket pocket.

I, I, you know, put my hand on my left shoulder, which is where that one pocket is. So, she shined a light on me and said, I see the antenna. I see it. You have it. And I was, I just, my whole energy just sank to the, to the bottom. And I, I went really, but it's amazing how, when your mind believes something really strongly, you can really convince yourself of an untruth. You know, so, and it can grip.

Brody: [00:37:27] We all hit that breaking point

Sunniva: [00:37:28] Absolutely. Absolutely.

Brody: [00:37:30] You gotta just be mentally aware.

Sunniva: [00:37:33] And be calm,

Brody: [00:37:35] Especially that don't start yelling in the darkness. I still can't believe I was three months. Jesus, three months. That's insane.



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Sunniva: [00:37:42] It was insane. And I was sleepy, I took, I have them with me here. I took, um, vitamin D. And I took, it's a little bottle of tincture that I got when I left Canada. And they said they recommend two drops. And I was, I put four drops every day because I thought I'm too sleepy. I felt like I couldn't wake up for a couple of months that I had this cloud sort of hanging over my head. It was really, it was very strange, and Hilde helped me though, and just staying active.

And I, and I wonder if some people, you know, dealing with COVID and staying at home, feel that same cloud. Because when you can't go outside and can't, you can't, you don't have that same stimulation with people or your places or your activities, that you feel like your world is just closing in on you. And it felt like that out there.

And in that, in Bamsebu in the cabin. And I had to work really hard to just keep active and stimulated. And oftentimes it just meant one shift of an activity. Just get up and do something. And that helped.

Brody: [00:38:45] Hmm. Honestly, I can't relate to that yet. Um, just because I live in California. And the sun's 24 7 out pretty much, but I can imagine what it would be like in that situation. And I maybe would not want to do that.

Sunniva: [00:39:03] You might not want to do that.

Brody: [00:39:07] Exactly. See how long I could last,

Sunniva: [00:39:10] I think what we did compares to what astronauts in space experience.

Mm, that

Brody: [00:39:15] makes a lot of sense. Actually

Sunniva: [00:39:16] just coping in isolation.

Brody: [00:39:18] Yeah. While you were in the Arctic and the 'black zone' uh, I don't know why I called it that sounds cool. Um, what did you realize, was important to you? And what wasn't? Did you like come to a conclusion being like, why was I so stressed about this earlier or, oh man, I should have been more stressed about this.

Sunniva: [00:39:39] Huh? That's a great question. Um, the first thing that comes flying out at me, when you asked me that is, uh, how little control I have.

Brody: [00:39:49] In what?

Sunniva: [00:39:50] Everything. I mean, I'm one of those people, I'm a little bit Type A, I'd like to think that I can control the outcome of all sorts of things. And there were so many

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things that happened there during our stay so far away from anybody, no neighbors, no anything. I mean, we're, we were as isolated as you'll ever get.

And I realized that. That the only thing we have control over is what we do with the circumstances around us. I mean, we had hurricane winds, uh, that ripped off our door and, um, we had so much snowfall in front of the front door that we couldn't get out of the cabin. And all, all we could do is, is just go into action and do something about it.

And I realized that all the, I worried about my job, I took a leave of absence from Polar Latitudes and Antarctic Operator to do this expedition, uh, as citizen scientists and polar ambassadors. And I had a very good job at the company. I was head of global sales for them and I was, you know, climbing up. And when I left, he said, my boss said, you're welcome to come back to the company, but I can't guarantee, you know, obviously what kind of job you would have.

And that's a big risk, you know, being without income for that long. So, I had no job security. And I was at Bamsebu , really worried about my job for months. And then all of a sudden COVID happens.

We had planned for many months to have this pick-up trip. We, uh, you know, May of this last May was going to be our big celebration as the first women to ever overwinter up in the Arctic without, without men, you know. And the fact that we succeeded in, in collecting data for NASA and Scripps [Scripps Institution of Oceanography] . The Norwegian polar Institute and all these scientists from around the world and that we engaged with over 5,000 kids from around the world via satellite and experts.

I mean, we check, check, check. We did all the things that we were set out to do in May we were supposed to have a ship come in and pick us up with Joss Stone, the musician. She dropped us off, uh, with, you know, our science partners, our sponsors, family, friends, special guests. And that was to be the big celebration.

And then all of a sudden. March 12th. We get an email from our social media, um, gal Maria, who says that the world is experiencing a global pandemic and Italy is on lockdown. And we're like, what. What happened? What does this mean? And then slowly the company I'm working for that operates only in the Antarctic, is not operating this year at all.

There's no cruise ships. The travel industry is upside down, no pickup trip. Canceled. So, all the things that I gave worry to, big and small during my stay there, I was reminded that the only, only thing I really Sunniva Sorby you have control over, is how I show up today. Today. And to do my best, like put out my best words, be kind. I realized how important the power of word is, written word. I reeled over and over, I thought about so many emails. I'd written to people where I was way too short. And didn't take the time to actually sit in a nice space



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and be quiet as if you would do when you're on your NOLS course. If you were writing somebody. It's just you and them and the pen.

And I, um, I realized how important it was to actually think about people. That was most important to me. My job wasn't important. My one, the one that I left. What was important was what I was doing there. At Bamsebu in the Arctic. What was important was my family and my friends and my community and letting them know that, tell them.

Brody: [00:44:07] Being able to express yourself.

Sunniva: [00:44:10] Absolutely. And tell, tell people how you feel about them.

Brody: [00:44:13] They'll never know. if you aren't there anymore.

Sunniva: [00:44:15] No, and I'm, I'm a big fan of, um, complimenting people on things that I think are cool or good, or, um, because, I don't know what's going to happen tomorrow. It's not, I don't live as if I'm going to die. I just, I just live just with, it's just, now's the perfect time, you know, to, to, to tell you that I. Yeah, I, I love your energy Brody. You're just like super switched on and engaging and curious. And, um, I'm so happy I get to meet you.

Brody: [00:44:49] Oh, seriously. It goes like twice the other way. This is one of the coolest people I've had the pleasure to speak to in a long time. So, um, I'm trying to do my best, keeping the conversation flowing and not rambling as much as I have been honestly,

Sunniva: [00:45:03] I don't think you've been rambling.

Brody: [00:45:05] I try. So,

Sunniva: [00:45:09] You, what I want to say right now, if I may? Is because I mentioned COVID and you know, I was, I've been up in the Arctic for the last year. You are my first, this is my first live podcast. With you. .

Oh, that's

Brody: [00:45:26] incredible. I actually didn't realize that because you literally just got back. Right?

Sunniva: [00:45:30] I just, uh, I just landed today, so, and I just, I just really wanted to talk to you because I feel like. Uh, number one, you just sounded like a really cool guy. Um, just what you're doing. Just the whole intention of the podcast.

And I, you know, Hilde and I have been really wanting to engage with the youth through our project because, we need you. Like, we need the curiosity and creativity and engagement that I don't know what happens to adults, they get to a certain age and they just stop. They stop learning, they stop creating.



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They. Yeah, there are the, like you talked about, you know, the, the, the risk takers that are on the top or the ones that are on the bottom, they will keep creating and, and being curious. But there's all those people in between that just stop. And I don't want to be one, I will never be one of those that stopped.

So, I am much more interested in what somebody like you thinks and has to say. So, I. I'm honored.

Brody: [00:46:32] So we actually, you mentioned this a lot earlier and it's one of the, one of the last questions that I wanted to ask, because I thought it was really interesting. And it's, it's you being a woman, one of the first, as you said, were first woman explorers to, um, travel through the Arctic, um, on your first expedition and now being one of the only two women to have done it without men in the Arctic for a full year.

So, do you feel as, as a woman, that there was like a stigma in the adventuring community, I guess you could say against that, or what adversity did you think you faced? If any, as a woman?

Sunniva: [00:47:09] No. Um, excellent question. There is really not a lot of stigma around, uh, women adventures or explorers anymore. It's a, I mean, they're doing also, women are doing all sorts of crazy things, just like men have been doing for a long time.

And it's, I meet more and more women that are doing stuff that I never imagined or that I'd never seen women do. So, we're living in a different time right now. When I went to the South Pole, in the Antarctic, that was definitely a lot of stigma. There were a lot of people that thought and expected us to fail.

We did not get one corporate sponsor for that expedition. Nike was sort of hanging in the wings and they didn't want to, uh, sponsor us. Uh, this is what we heard anyway. Because they feared that one of us would die. And what would that make them look like? So, there was a whole lot of stigma around the fact that we were the first women trying to do that.

And then you, and that was, that was a long time ago. And then fast forward to us doing this in the Arctic. And what was so strange in the community out there was, uh, how. How could two women possibly survive, in the Arctic, for so long in the circumstances we were, we were in. And. You know, it didn't happen overnight.

I mean, I have built my career, uh, sideways upside down. When I spoke to that high school group for, for career day, I had, at that time, probably 23 different things, I had done. All of them, I was proud of. I've been a dental assistant even. I mean, I've done all sorts of different things to sort of maybe just to understand and bridge the divide between differences that we think exist between people. Because there are so few. Really. Just, we think there are.



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So, this Arctic expedition, we had a lot of people ask us, is this a women's expedition? Are you really trying to prove and well, yeah, it is because we're women? So, it's very much, uh, that. But more, more importantly, we wanted to just show up as leaders, as female pioneers and leaders. At a time when the world really needs a different view of what good leadership looks like.

You know, neither Hilde nor myself believe that one person as a dictator is ever effective. What's effective is collaboration. And women historically have been much better at collaborating and getting incredible results and making kick ass things happen by bringing people together to get it done. And in a caring and compassionate, loving way. Right? Not about getting to the top, doing it yourself, and saying, look what I did.

So, we definitely feel like we're living in a different time, where women are accepted in the expedition and exploration world. But we're also showing up both, both of us, have learned so much about the power of our voice and how important it is to actually stand up for what you believe in. You know and use your words with authenticity and integrity. And if you don't know what you believe in, find out what you believe in and then stand up for it.

And that's, that's what our expedition in the Arctic was all about. Us taking our decades of careers, myself in the, and the Antarctic and Hilde up in the Arctic, and coming together as Hearts in the Ice, which is the name of our project. And pulling people in from around the world to fall in love with, uh, the natural world. Because she is choking. Mother Nature is choking.

Brody: [00:51:09] I think the last thing I want to ask is what you've learned about global warming and how it's changed, while you were there. Cause I know that was the main focus.

Sunniva: [00:51:18] Yeah. Um, well, uh, climate change is not something new. And neither is global warming. It's been happening for many decades. And the thing that I've really learned in this past year being at, uh, at Bamsebu stationary, and chatting with all these scientists from around the world, is that the problem we're facing right now is that it's, it's changing so fast. All of the, you know, from the increase in temperature, to the lack of sea ice, to species redistribution, to the loss of species, to are an introduction of new species. Like a fish up in the Arctic that they've never seen before. To polar bears eating reindeer, as opposed to seal for their primary food source, because they can't find the seal cause there's no pack ice.

That there's a high degree of adaptation needed now. And we as humans and all of these species out there, and plants and insects and everything, all the biodiversity, has always had in it really remarkable ability to adapt. It's just, that's what our natural world is. It's adaptive. Um, the problem in this last year more than ever is that there's less of a rubber band for adaptation.



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So, there's very little wiggle room for something to be taken to the extreme. And we're kind of at the extreme now. Where we're seeing trends over so many decades, that we can only afford a few more years of that same trend for something to actually really crumble. And we're about, they say that we're beyond the tipping point.

And so, what I have learned, more than ever, and that I'm so passionate about is, we cannot afford to sit back and watch the show anymore. Every single person out there, regardless of where you live or how old you are or what you're interested in. Every single person needs to find a way to show up and to take, to take action.

And I don't mean go out there with a sign and you know, um, to become an activist. I mean, be curious about the natural world so that you actually fall in love with it, and then you protect it. You know, we only protect what we love and if we continue to stay disconnected from the natural world, because of our, all the technology, that's supposed to make us a lot more efficient and have information flow, come in at rapid, rapid paces. And for us to continue to create and build models of change. That's great. But the, you know, we live in a world right now where information should be accessible to all, resources should also be accessible to all. But we live in a world where there's still poverty. We live in a world where some people have access to no information and no healthcare. And, uh, and I mentioned this because it does have to do with the climate with climate change.

Um, is if people don't have their basic needs met, they are not going to care about throwing plastic in the ocean. Probably not, you know. So, we, as people, if someone needs a hand up, put your hand down, you know. Like we need to help each other. I think we all need to be better collaborators, better mentors. Uh, which means better role models and better mentees, better learners.

And I really, in this last year, I mean, everybody is beating the drum. And the scientists have lost, they feel like there's such a disconnect between the science world and the average person. Because they write these protocol and, and papers that nobody can understand or read unless you're a scientist.

And so, what we're doing and what we've done in this past year as citizen scientists, is we have been two people building stories around our project and around the changes we've seen. So that people can listen to the data that the scientists are sharing, because if you don't measure it, it doesn't get counted and they measure everything. So, they can see trends over decades.

We're taking all that data, and we're taking our personal experience with the data and the thing we're saying or studying, and we're building stories around it. So, people can understand that, climate change, there's no one size fits all. I mean, you're in California, you have forest fires, you have floods.



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I'm in Norway. Um, there are forest fires in Siberia. In Norway there's a lack of pack ice up in the Arctic. There is a, um, rain that falls more than it ever used to. So, you know, we're, the world is, is, uh, mother nature. If you were to think of her as, as a body with organs, all of her organs are sort of failing.

It's not just the lungs that are hurting now. It's, she's got a headache. She's got a body ache. Her muscular system is failing. Her nervous system. Her lungs. So, um, you know, we have to stop living the way we're living. Um, and now is a perfect time to start experimenting with living differently, living a little bit more in harmony with, with nature and, and others. Um, doing more giving and less taking. And being a thoughtful user,

Brody: [00:56:43] if you could choose one thing that all people would just start doing, what would that one thing be?

Sunniva: [00:56:51] Um, I would, I mean, it, it it's, that's a tough one for me. I would just say, observe what it takes to stay in balance.

And then ask yourself, well, what in the world does that mean? You know, what does it mean to stay in balance? Um, and I'll elaborate just a second, because I can sound a little bit, maybe ethereal. But if, if we continue to live in worlds that are so disconnected from all the problems that the ocean is facing and that the wildlife, and if we, if we stay isolated in those worlds, we'll never feel like any of this matters to us.

I would say, find something to be curious about outside. And then follow the thread. Where does it come from? How does it breed? What does it eat? What's happened to that little, if it's a species of something, what's happened to it in the last year, 10 years, 20 years. Like be curious about your backyard

Brody: [00:57:56] Sunniva Sorby. 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 again.