
HE SHOVELED DIRT ONTO HIS FATHER'S GRAVE AT 15. TWO DECADES LATER, HE BECAME IDRIS ELBA'S PRIVATE CHEF.

SUMMARY KEYWORDS

grief, fatherhood, nigerian culture, masculinity, vulnerability, imposter syndrome, self-love, entrepreneurship, celebrity chef, ego, business partnerships, the dad project

SPEAKERS

King, Naroop Jhooti

Naroop 00:00

Every man carries something. Expectations, silence, struggles, the weight of having to look unbreakable.

Naroop 01:47

The Dad Project is a home for real, unfiltered conversations on men's mental health, the kind that have been missing for far too long. We share powerful stories and raw perspectives from those living it and those guiding men through it. Filmed at the Old Court in Windsor, it's about breaking silence, reshaping strength, and creating conversations that actually matter. I'm your host, Naroop Jhooti. Let's talk.

Naroop 02:23

Before we start, let me take 30 seconds and speak to you directly. This podcast exists to share real stories, honest conversations that inspire growth, self-belief, and meaningful change. If you get value from these episodes, following or subscribing is the easiest way to support what we're building here. It helps this reach more people who appreciate authentic conversation and allows us to keep creating stories like this. All right, thank you for being here. Now, into the episode. So, King, what is the story people don't see when they hear that you're Idris Elba's private chef?

King 03:00

The story, that's an interesting question. The story people don't see is what led me to get to that stage where Idris Elba asked me to come on board and be chef. That story is entrenched with a lot. It comes with a lot. It's an interesting story. You know, people always want the glamour. What does it look like? Oh my god, it's incredible. Incredible. But yo, the lead up to that, man, it's work. It's work. That's what people don't see, the hard work. People don't realize the dedication, the focus, everything that goes into being something great. The sacrifices that takes. People don't see that.

Naroop 03:52

Did you ever think when you were a young man that you'd be cooking food for people that we see in movies?

King 04:00

Absolutely not. You could never have told me, even ten years ago, you could never have told me that.

Naroop 04:06

Why? Why would you not have believed?

King 04:07

Because it's not, okay, I can say this. I didn't set out to be a chef. Especially not a chef at this level. I didn't set out. Food was something that for me just, I love to do. It just was, I like to eat. So I was like, well, you need to learn how to cook if you're going to eat. So I think for me, it just never dawned on me, oh, you can turn this into a profession. So it kind of found me. Food was always there, you know, it's in our culture. It's traditions. It's what we do. I'm Nigerian, that's what we do. So for me, it just was a side hustle, and then here we are.

Naroop 04:47

You told me when you were younger, one of your earliest memories of food and cooking was seeing your dad make breakfast on a Sunday and you were just sat there looking at him thinking this is crazy, in awe. Why would that memory of, like, he was cooking a fry up, why was it so powerful for you?

King 05:07

I tell you why it was powerful, because my dad was a typical Nigerian man. He did not get in the kitchen. That kitchen was not a thing Nigerian men did, right? Nigerian men get waited on hand and foot. The wife comes with the bowl of water and the lemon and they

wash their hands with the cloth, and it's a ritual, right? So men don't go in the kitchen. So for me, and I'm one of five, I'm one of five, and I'm the only boy. I was a daddy's boy. I was his shadow, you know. Rest his soul. And I wanted to do whatever he did. So every now and again he would just get up, and I'm talking, I probably saw this twice in my lifetime. It wasn't a regular thing, and the one time it stood out was he got in the kitchen, and I remember he just did a big traditional English breakfast, not anything crazy, but he knew what he was doing and he just got everything together.

It was just fascinating to see him crack the eggs into the pan, whisk them up, chop up the onions and the tomatoes, and I remember he taught me how to fry an egg where you chuck the oil over the egg yolk, and to this day I still don't like that. But it just was an aesthetic I remember watching him do, and I'd see the egg transformed, has that layer over it once he chucked the oil all over it. For me, that just was fascinating. I just stood back in awe, and that is one of the earliest memories I have of wanting to cook.

Naroop 06:40

But that didn't lead you to jump into culinary school, did it? Your life.

King 06:45

No, it's just, childhood was challenging. Our family had a lot of ups and downs growing up. We moved house, God knows how many times. I've lost count how many times in my early teenage years. So no, cooking wasn't, like I said earlier on, cooking wasn't a thing where I thought, oh, this is going to be a career. And look, I'm Nigerian. In a Nigerian household, academics comes first. There's no such thing as culinary arts or art. What do you mean art? That's not a thing in our community. It's education, education, education. I was naturally gifted with intellect. I was an A student. Didn't really have to study, if I'm honest with you. It came to me naturally. So I could go to school and I'd get A's. So that was my trajectory, the typical standard, go to school, get good grades, pass your GCSEs, pass your A levels, go to university. That was the trajectory. So the food thing didn't come till probably I was like 28. It just wasn't even on my peripheral like that.

Naroop 08:01

You shared something really powerful with me when we had our call, which was about your father passing away. And you shared it with me and you just kind of almost recited it, like, it's this year, then this happened, then I did this. But it sat with me for so long, and I didn't dive deep into it because I was trying to understand your life story. But talk to me about his funeral, man, because gosh, I put myself in your position, and I was thinking, what an unimaginable thing to happen for a child.

King 08:35

Yeah, so I was 15 when my dad passed. It's January, he passed January 11th, 1998, right? And then we buried him January 30th, 1998. I'd never been to a funeral before. I'd never seen a dead body before. I had no idea what to expect. I remember the morning of the funeral. This is so poignant in my mind's eye. I remember my room was at the front of this house we were in, we'd moved there. So let me just back up a little bit. My dad was ill. He had a brain hemorrhage two years before he died, and then he eventually died of complications, bronchial pneumonia. So those two years he suffered. He was in and out of hospital. It got to a point where my mom couldn't care for him. Obviously there was all of us as well, it became too much for her. So he had to go into assisted living care, whatever you want to call it. So those two years were very difficult, and our family then moved. We had to move home again.

What was supposed to happen is he was supposed to come home to this house. We had a house that was designed for his disability, so it had a stairlift and all that sort of stuff and railings everywhere. He didn't make it. He didn't make it to the house. The last time I saw my dad was just before Christmas in 1997. So I want to go back to the house we were in. My bedroom was at the front of the house, so I had the front window, and I remember everyone was scrambling around the house getting ready, and I remember putting on this horrible suit, it was from like River Island, horrible, horrible suit, polyester, and I had these fake black Patrick Cox shoes as well. I thought I was the man, but yeah. Anyway, I had this blue tie and this blue shirt. I remember putting on the suit and looking out the window and seeing the hearse. We lived on a cul-de-sac. I remember seeing the hearse come around, and my heart just sunk. But at the same time, there was a ray of light that came through the window. And I remember standing there and I was like, I don't know how I'm supposed to feel.

What am I supposed to do? What's this feeling? So I thought, all right, just get on with it. Just carry on. I remember getting to the church, and the pallbearers saying to me, you've got to walk ahead of the coffin. I'm 15. What do you mean I've got to walk? What do you mean? It's overwhelming. And I've got mom, all my sisters, and the church is packed. It's heaving, right? My dad knew a lot of people. So I remember walking in front of the coffin and just being terrified. I remember shaking, just terrified. So when the service commences, and then at the end of the service they view the body, and I remember being terrified, I remember shaking, because I hadn't seen my dad since I saw him alive, which was now, what, maybe a month or so. So I remember coming up to the coffin and I remember seeing his shoes first, and as I came up, it was in slow motion. I remember

walking up, and we buried him in this beautiful light gray suit, and my mom asked me to pick it out because she didn't want to bury him in black. I was like, black is so morbid, we should put him in this light gray suit. My dad used to wear glasses as well, and we put his glasses in his top pocket. My dad was very smart, that's how he dressed in life. He was always very smart and poised, shoes ironed, shirts, everything. So we put his glasses in his top pocket and a pen as well.

And I remember coming up and then seeing the detail. I remember seeing his shoes first, then seeing the handkerchief in the pocket. And then I came up and I looked in, and I did not like what I saw. I had never seen a dead body before. First of all, it didn't even look like him. I was like, what is this? They shrink, and it just wasn't him. But something in me was just like, all right, he's there somewhere. You're not going to see him again, so you're going to have to touch him. I remember picking up his hand and it was like lead. It just was like lead, and I just was like, oh, wow, this is weird. So then we get past that, and I remember the pallbearers securing the casket lid, and they use this power screwdriver, and you hear it, and I was shuddering because I was like, that's final, that's it.

So when we get to the cemetery, and I think this is the part that to this day is still heavy. As the only son, we bury our own, right, around our community, you know, West African, Nigerian community, we bury our own. So all the men have to shovel the dirt into the grave, and I remember being given the shovel by someone, I don't know who it was, and was just told to shovel the dirt in this grave. And I remember it was a huge amount of dirt, and I remember getting the shovel and I'm the only one doing it, and I'm shoveling this dirt in, and I'm looking down in this grave, and I'm just like, what the hell, this is crazy.

And I remember in that part saying to myself, don't break, don't break, because one of my uncles had said to me, prior to the funeral, you can't be seen to cry, you can't be seen to show emotion, you're the man in the house. Now, what does that mean at 15? What do you mean, the man in the house? Don't cry, because if you cry, you're going to set your mom and your sisters off, so you can't be seen to cry. So I had that as I'm shoveling the dirt.

Naroop 15:12

Did you feel like crying?

King 15:16

Absolutely. Every fiber in me was like terrified. I was more terrified than anything, right? Just seeing my dad's dead body, and now I'm chucking dirt into this hole in a graveyard. Like, what do you mean? It's all confusing and it's scary. It didn't feel real. It felt surreal. Honestly, it didn't feel real. I can still smell the dirt, like the mud. I can still smell it. Honestly, it was real obviously, but at the time you're doing it, I'm 15, I don't know anything. You don't know anything. What I know now, I look back and think, God, I was a baby. I was a little boy, a scared little boy, and didn't have no guidance.

There was no one to tell you what to expect. No one to tell you how to conduct yourself, or what emotions were. No one to guide me through what that feels like, or this is what it's going to look like when you look into the coffin, or this is what it's going to look like when you're at the grave site. I'd never been to a funeral before. So all of that mixed into the emotion of being a teenager, right, going through puberty, just the average everyday stuff you're going through. You throw all that into the mix and you're like, what the hell is going on here?

Naroop 16:43

Is it still normal in Nigerian culture for men to not show any emotion at funerals? Is that still the same?

King 16:45

I think in any culture, men don't get the okay to be emotionally available, to show emotion. I think it's somewhat shifting now, but I still think men are not supposed to show emotion. This is what I see in society, men are not, they're the providers, they are the caretakers, physical and otherwise, you're supposed to be there for every other facet, but to be emotionally available for yourself, which I think is wrong, and I think that's across cultures.

Naroop 17:16

Do you think you can cry and still provide?

King 17:24

Absolutely. I think being in tune with your emotions is healthy. It's understanding what these emotions are and not shying away from them. It's actually delving into them so you can go through it and see what does this feel like, what does this mean when that happens. Oh, I can navigate by doing that and then I can get over it. You don't know that until you go through it, do you understand?

Naroop 17:47

So that smell of mud.

King 17:49

Yeah, you can still, I mean burying your father is hard in our culture, week from, okay. And so when I lost my grandfather I was 30, I had all four of my grandparents alive till I was 30, so I'm very blessed. And then when he died, again, first dead body I'd really seen of someone super close. Same thing, man, hand felt heavy, couldn't recognize him. And then it's not a good, we put him into the furnace, and then when it caught, it took me a good six, seven months just to understand what does it mean when someone who you've, like a grandfather, your second dad, right, he's not here right now, what does that mean, what does it, what does emptiness mean.

Naroop 18:43

For you to then be thrust into this position of being a man of the house, what does it mean to be a man of the house? I know that was quite formative for you because you didn't quite know how to process it, and certain parts of your life, especially academics, did suffer, right?

King 18:58

I think what was interesting is being told you're the man of the house now, right at 15, your dad's just died, you're the man of the house now, it's your mom, there's your three sisters in the household, and I have an older sister from my dad's side, which at the time we weren't in communication with. Being told all of that, and then told not to cry, not to show emotion, not to do all that. It's heavy. Like, what do you mean? How else am I supposed to feel in this? How else am I supposed to communicate if I can't even get this out? Do you understand? It's ludicrous to even think about it.

Naroop 19:45

But what was it that you would say then caused you to, in your own words, start drifting through life?

King 19:55

So I think not being able to communicate or even talk about how I felt afterwards, and I'll give you a story as well. There was a really good family friend of ours, God rest her, named Dolores. She died last year. She was a great influence in my life, I want to say that. In fact, she's responsible for some of the phrases that I say to this day. I'll get on to that in a minute. But I remember she was driving past me one day, and she said she saw me

with my head down, I might have been going to school or whatever. She said that she saw me, I was walking, I had my head down, and she said she didn't stop, she just watched me, and she was like, yeah, he's going through it. When I look back and hear that in hindsight, I'm like, no one intervened. No one asked me, am I all right, how do I feel, what do you feel. There was no aftercare. There was nothing. It's just, get on with it. And I think that was really detrimental in terms of mourning, starting the mourning process, grieving, and just general welfare of a young black boy. Yes, I was academic, yes, I was of a certain intellect, and I think that was taken for granted by my family. I've always been more mature at that stage, I'd always been more mature than I looked.

So I kind of automatically was given that role, just get on with it, do you know what I mean? I was king, he's all right, he can handle it. So yes, I could handle it, but the other areas start to be affected. So I did my GCSEs, and I remember one of the teachers, head of the math department, her name was Miss Brady, and she pulled me aside after class and she said, King, now we are aware of what's happened in your family, would you like us to take this into consideration for your GCSEs? I said absolutely not. There was no way I was going to let you use that as an excuse, because number one, my dad wouldn't allow me to. And even when I look back now and say that to myself, that at that age, 14, 15, the strength to say that with conviction, and not really even understanding why I'm saying it, because it's built in you to just get on with things, and maybe it's cultural, maybe it's traditional, I don't know, it's just built in you. Just get on with it, don't use these things as an excuse. When I look back now I'm like, how did I even take that on board to verbalize that?

Naroop 23:03

What do you think it was?

King 23:03

I think it probably was my defense, part of it is my defense mechanism. Yes, I know what's going on, I don't really understand it, so I don't really want to talk about it. Does that make sense? It's just like, yep, cool, skip over it, next. And I think that coupled with, you're the man in the house, all of that stuff, it's compound. All of that compounds. So you don't know what to do with that. You're just like, all right, let me not deal with it, because I'm not dealing with all this other stuff, so I can't deal with that, so just skip over it. So I did my GCSEs, and I remember the day I got my results, they came in the post, and I got two A's, three B's and four C's. I was devastated. I remember opening the letter, my mom was standing there, and it was a beautiful sunny morning, and the letter came,

and I was anticipating it, and I was excited, and I opened it. My mom was standing next to me, and I told her the results, and she was like, God, your dad would be really proud. In my head I was like, yeah, but I could have done a lot better. So yes, academics were affected by what had happened. But at the time I didn't, I just got on with it, it just was a case of, oh, whatever. But clearly it did.

You know, I was always a student, so for me to get C's was like, what is this? And that was without even trying. So I think for me, once that happened, I was like, all right, cool, whatever. And then I went on to college, and I think that's when it kind of went downhill for me, but I think by the time I got to college I had a zero-care attitude, because my family environment was really fragmented, in so many different ways that I don't think I could cope. If I look back now I can look at it, I wasn't coping.

Naroop 25:09

And what were you going through, what was the challenge?

King 25:09

All right, I'll tell you what the challenge was. So in our community, when a man dies, the rest of the men in the community rally around and help the family, help the mother, they've got children, help the family financially and otherwise. Now, that's cultural. So we had an uncle come in and kind of assume the role, the male role in the family, and he would come in every now and again. Now, traditionally, that's what happens. No one explained that to me. So I just see this man come in, and all of a sudden he's there, he's there with mom, he's always around the house, he's buying stuff and paying for this and that. And I'm like, okay, no one really explained that. So I'm looking at it, I'm like, my dad's just died, and now this guy's here, who's this? No one explained that. So I've got conflict with that, I've got internal conflict with that. I then clash with my mom, because in her community where she grew up, this is normal, but I live in the UK, I was born and raised there, no one's explained this.

Naroop 26:32

What was it? Was it the sense that you're trying to replace my dad, or is with someone else?

King 26:38

I think at that age, again looking back in hindsight, I think at that age you think, yes, he's coming to replace my dad. And I'm like, how dare you? Especially when my dad and this guy were like good best friends, and we'd see him around, and now all of a sudden he's

here, and what the hell, like it was confusing for me, okay. And he would provide whatever, so me and my mom clashed and clashed, to the point where I just think I was like, screw everything, screw education, screw all that. So I stopped, not stopped going to college, but I bunked off college a lot, and so much so, I remember I failed my art A level. I got ungraded, right. And don't get me wrong, I loved art, I was fantastic at it, and the history particularly, the stories behind a lot of the artists were incredible. And I had this art teacher, her name was Diana Wilm, and she said to me, King, I just want to say, you actually failed your art A level. I was like, yeah, okay, whatever.

But she was like, but your written paper was written so beautifully and articulately, that's what gave you your E. She said, you were ungraded, but your written paper gave you this E, she said it was fantastic. And I was like, yeah, I know, you don't have to tell me that. Without being arrogant, I just was like, yeah, I just didn't give a shit. So my academics did suffer going into college. And then there was the clearing thing, because I got two C's and an E for my A levels, and I was like, yeah, I'm not going to do anything with this. I didn't care at that time, I just was like, all right, whatever. But then you've got friends going off to university and they're going through clearing. So I remember being there and thinking to myself, oh, what am I going to do? And I was like, all right, let me see if I can work with these results.

So I said to myself, all right, let me go through clearing, let me see. All my friends were going to these incredible universities, there was Brunel, there was University of Durham, there were all these fantastic universities, and I was like, I feel left out, I'm the academic, what do you mean? So I applied for clearing. I applied to Brunel for an engineering management degree, and I got accepted based off my extracurricular activities, because I'd just done the Prince's Trust course as well. So I went to Brunel, knew nothing about engineering. I lasted six weeks and I was like, yeah, this isn't for me. So I dropped out of Brunel, and then I applied for a few jobs. Do you remember the company Kodak? The photograph company. So I worked for them for a while, and then my sister was working for London Underground, and she said they're recruiting. I was like, oh, all right, let me go. I'm 18 now, so I applied as a station assistant.

Didn't get it on the first round, and I was gutted. So I reapplied, got in on the second hand, and started there. Started at Green Park Station as a station assistant. Hated every minute of it. I hated that job. The way the public treated you, like you're a piece of chewing gum on the floor. And the uniform was so heavy, you had to wear all the radio and the hat, it just was a lot. And it was so hot down there as well. I hated that job. And

then, I laugh because this is actually quite a crazy story, I got assaulted when I was on my break outside the station. This guy came up and clearly he wasn't the full ticket, and he assaulted me with a wine bottle. Needless to say, I tackled him, we won't go into that. And after that I had to think long and hard about my trajectory, and I was like, okay, this is probably not suited for me. So I thought, all right, I need to look at going back to academics.

Naroop 31:06

So I went back and tried to figure out what I wanted to do, and the food thing wasn't quite there yet, it wasn't a fully fleshed out idea yet, and I was like, well look, I love music, I love business, let's try and combine the two. So I found this degree, music industry management, and it was at Buckinghamshire Chiltern's University College in High Wycombe. So I applied, I got in, did the degree, I got bored towards the end, it just wasn't for me towards the end. Anyway, graduated, and then I was still working part-time for London Underground on Saturdays, Sundays. I graduated and I was like, all right, music industry job, or do I stay in London Underground where the salaries are already great, and if I go full-time I'm already up there.

So I went for the underground. That same year, the train driver's job came out, so my salary went from like 26K to 38K. I'm 23 now, right, and I was like, oh, this is a nice jump, all right, we can do this money. So I bought a flat. And then I guess we can skip forward a few years, I'm cooking, doing family events, friends events, and everyone's like, you got something here, right, you should think about this. And I was like, we'll see. Anyway, I had this idea, I did a friends and family, what's the word, a friends and family kind of critique day. So it's like a Sunday, I called about 30 people around, and I had this questionnaire, and I did everything, I did grilled chicken, at this time I used to love Caribbean food, that used to be my forte, so I think I did jerk chicken, I did rice and peas, I did everything, right, and I had a score sheet from 1 to 10, one being bad, ten being great, score it. Needless to say, it was more on the 10 side.

So I was like, all right, we got something here, and I was like, okay, let me turn this into something. So I made these little business cards, and it was called The Grill King. So I went around handing these cards out, and I just started doing small jobs here and there, and then traction started picking up, and I was like, okay, there's something here, right? And then, where I lived at the time, in Northwest London, Park Royal, all industrial, a lot of warehouses, a lot of workers, and I looked at this area and I was like, well look, you live right bang in the center of all of this, you've got all of these businesses and nowhere for

people to get lunch. So alarm bells started ringing, I was like, we'll just do a lunchtime delivery service. So I remember getting together this menu, I think I had three things on it, I had jerk chicken, I think I had an oxtail and a fish dish and sides and stuff. And then I went out and gave samples out. The next day the phone started ringing, the phone just was ringing off the hook, and I was like, all right, this is something. So I bought a little moped, little red moped, called it Mary Jane, loved that moped, I had a heated back box, sprayed it black, I thought I was the man.

And started this delivery service, I called it KK's at the time, King's Kitchen. And I'm doing this alongside being a train driver, so I'm doing this at lunchtime, I'm driving the trains in the evening. With the trains you could pick and choose the shifts you wanted to do, so I was like, okay, we can split it, I can do the trains in the evening, do this in the day. So everything was going well. And then it got to a point where I was so tired, I hit a red signal, and this is the time when the train was manual, this is I'm talking way back when. And I hit a red signal, the funny thing is when I hit the red signal I was slowing down, I hit it at five miles an hour, so I was responding to the signal, but I was on autopilot, I was so tired.

When they downloaded the data, the manager was like, but you were slowing down, how did you hit the signal? And he was like, yeah, you must have been on autopilot. I was like, yeah. And I was like, okay, I've got to wake up, I can't do the two. And at the time the train driver's job was necessary, it was great, so I was like, okay, cool, let me just stick with this, let me put the food stuff on the back burner, but we've got something.

King 35:36

So we fast forward a few years later, and I'm like, all right, let me give this another shot. But this time, if I'm going to do it, let me do it properly, I need to get some professional take on this. So I had a friend who had a couple of gastro pubs, one in Hampstead called the Duke of Hamilton, one in Islington called the Barnsbury. And he used to let me come on the weekends down to the Duke of Hamilton and do barbecues. They were so successful, this is like 2010 to maybe 2012, every weekend the barbecue sold out. Fantastic.

And he was like, look, this is great, why don't you let me train you up properly, come to my other gastro pub, train you up properly. And I was like, I don't know if that's what I want, man, I don't know, but I said, yeah, cool, do it anyway. So I went over to the Barnsbury, and there was a chef there, an executive chef, Ivan, he was Slovakian, and he

was a real piece of work. I think he felt threatened by me for whatever reason. I wasn't there to take his job, I didn't care about it, I was just there to learn. And we had an argument one day in the kitchen, and I walked out and I was like, I'm not going back there, I don't care what you're paying me, I'm not going back there. So I'd gone part-time on the trains, and I went full-time, I was working seven days a week. And I took a step back and I was like, yeah, I knew it wasn't for me, that's not what I wanted to do. So I was like, King, if you're going to do this, you're going to do it for yourself. So that's when I decided to transform that into my catering company, which is called King's Kitchen. So I had that, early stages was 2008, when I really took it seriously was 2012, 2013, and I did that up to 2020.

Naroop 37:51

This is when, yeah, you had this chance encounter, right, so that's a little bit later, because this is what has led, did you, I guess, start to see you down this path of where you are now.

King 38:07

Yeah, so we skip forward to 2018. I'm going to New York for a friend's birthday, it's like a long weekend, and I'm flying with a friend of mine, it's her birthday, but we're going to meet friends, we've got friends in New York already. So I used to follow this chef on social media, very similar style type of cooking to what I was doing, same sort of background, he's black, similar age, similar concept, and I was like, yo, this guy's dope, I love what he's doing, I would love to do something like this one day, it was an inspiration. And I said, if I ever get the chance to meet him. So flying to New York, I'm in the Virgin Lounge, Terminal 3, this guy walks past me.

I had seen on social media that he was in London, but I'm like, yo, he's just walked past me, I have to introduce myself. So I went up, introduced myself, turns out we're on the same flight to New York, right? So we land in New York, he goes off, he gives us comps to like a restaurant, and he was that guy. We had a great time, and he was like, look, I'm coming back to London, this was October 2018, he's like, I'm coming back to London in November, I'm doing a job for Idris Elba, I'm going to need some help. I was like, yeah, call me, didn't think he was going to call me, just celebrity chat, thinking he's just talking nonsense.

Naroop 39:29

Were you excited by the opportunity of it?

King 39:29

Of course, come on, that's an opportunity of a lifetime. To actually say it, but then to actually do it is two different things, right? So a month later he calls me, and I was like, yo, let's do it, and at the time, very nervous. But at the time I had my catering company, so I had a service kitchen, so I was like, look, I've got everything here, I've got all the equipment, what do you need, let's go. And so we went and did the job, and I met the Elbas, lovely, really just lovely people.

Naroop 40:07

You skipped over, met the Elbas, okay, go on, go on, go on. What was it like? You walk in, Idris is there, obviously, were you a fan?

King 40:11

Was I a fan? I don't think fan is the word, I think I admired him, admired his craft, admired his skill, I knew he was that guy.

Naroop 40:26

But now here you're cooking, taking you in front of a star, that's a big deal. Is there a little pat on your back moment?

King 40:35

You know what, I took a picture of myself because I was like, I want to remember this moment. And I remember at the end of that shift, I sat on the kitchen counter and I took a selfie, and I was like, yeah, you did this. So I've got it somewhere, I'll share it with you. And that was my moment to realize, look, you're here, you said you wanted to do this, cook for whoever, and whatever, you've just done it. So much so, we did such a great job, they invited us to their home the next day, because they were having, I think it was like a Thanksgiving dinner. So we went, did a bang-up job. What was interesting about that was I started sensing some energy from the chef, right? And I'm like, this is the chef you met in the airport, this is the chef who called me to do this job, right? I started sensing this energy, and I'm like, am I imagining this? Like this weird energy, like this guy doesn't want me to be here, like what's going on?

King 41:35

So I remember it was Thanksgiving, right, you know, American, they have like cornbread and collard greens, I know nothing about this food, right, I'm taking his lead, so I'm under his watchful eye. So he's like, make some cornbread. So I was like, okay, no problem, but do you have a recipe that you'd like me to follow, because this is your show, I'm just here

to help you out. Figure it out, okay, I figured it out. I made these banging cornbread muffins. Let me tell you something, they were singing when they came out the oven, right? And I remember putting them out, put some butter on it as well, right, fresh out the oven. So then some of the guests are eating it, and I can hear them talking about, oh my god, these are incredible, who made these? And I'm like, yeah, this is something. But obviously this chef hears, and for some reason he comes up with this glaze that he had made and tries to put it on top. No, no, no, no, no, they're fine as they are, they're enjoying them as they are. So much so I had to go and make more.

Naroop 42:44

But is this common within the culinary world? Because we know how many chefs suffer from mental health, we know suicide is high in the hospitality industry. Is there this rivalry, is that quite common?

King 43:03

Yes, there is rivalry, but let me tell you, it shouldn't make you treat people badly, do you understand? Being competitive is part of anything that we do in life, it's just a natural human condition to be competitive, of course. But to be nasty to people whilst being competitive, there's no room for that. In my kitchen there's no room for that, and that's only insecurity. So when you see someone do that, it screams insecurity, but that's got nothing to do with me. So I was ready to leave, I'm going to be honest with you, I was ready to leave, I was like, this isn't for me, I didn't come here for this, this is not what I came here to do.

So that was that. Anyway, something happened, right, I don't want to go into that, something happened, and it led me to just take over the situation. So I just took over, we finished up, we cleaned down, and went about our business. So a couple months later I get a phone call, it's Idris's people, they've been trying to get hold of me, they'd like me to come and do some work for him, am I available? This is February 2019 now. So it just now wanted me to start doing personal work, right? So I get a phone call, I've been trying to get hold of you, so I was like, oh okay, so I go over, I do this job, and it's a week-long job, an incredible job with Slick Rick, Slick Rick was part of this camp.

King 44:36

So anyway, on that particular job, to my surprise, Idris walks in and he says, um, me and Sabrina were talking, and we would just love you to do part of our wedding. And I'm like, who, me? He's like, yeah, yeah, yeah, we were discussing it, we would just love you to do part of our wedding. I said, well, what about? They were like, no, no, no, we want you to do

it. And I was like, okay. And he's like, it's in Morocco, it's this amount of people. And I'm like, okay, okay. So I'm there and I'm just like, what do you mean you want me to do your wedding? And he's like, don't worry, Sabrina will call you tomorrow, she'll go through all the details. She calls me the following day, gives me the details, and I'm sitting there after this call thinking, how did I get here? What do you mean I'm now doing their wedding in Morocco?

Naroop 45:40

Were you prepared to do a wedding like that?

King 45:40

Okay, cool, so I was prepared on the scale, because it was like 200-odd people, 250 people, we were already catering on that scale in my business for corporate. So that wasn't the issue. My fear at the time was I'd never worked with celebrities before, especially on this scale, I'm doing a wedding. So there were lots of other celebrities, everybody, they were all there, right. I think Vogue had taken the reins on it, so it was a whole Vogue thing. So there was everyone there, and it was in Morocco, and it was over three nights and different venues, it was fabulous and five-star, it was opulent, as you can imagine.

And I'm walking into this and thinking to myself, well, how do I know about this? Yeah, I can do catering volume-wise, that's cool, but I was like, okay, I don't know anything about doing a wedding of this scale. So I had to tap into all my resources. I had a good friend, shout out, Natty, big up yourself, Nay. He introduced me to a celebrity wedding planner. Had a great meeting with her, and she said, this is what you need to do, she gave me the blueprint. I was like, oh, thank God, brilliant.

Naroop 47:06

What would happen if you hadn't met her?

King 47:06

I'd hate to think, honestly. I would have figured it out.

Naroop 47:09

Do you think you would have?

King 47:09

Yeah, you wouldn't have backed away. Absolutely not, I'm all about accept the challenge, figure out how to do it after. I feel that's ingrained in me, I don't know where that's come

from, honestly. I love a challenge, I love something that's going to stretch me mentally. Give me a challenge, because after you've done that challenge, you've got the belt now, right, you've got that, and there's going to be bigger challenges after, or I should hope so. Bring it on, let's see how far we can go.

Naroop 47:46

Is it important to you?

King 47:47

Super important, I think because that's how you grow. Otherwise you don't evolve, you just stay sedentary, and I don't want to do that. Who wants to do that? What's the point in life?

Naroop 47:59

Was this like a sense of validation for you, that you've got this wedding?

King 48:02

Absolutely, man, it was a sense of validation on so many levels, professionally, emotionally, intellectually, in terms of visibility as well. It just was, it was levels. There was so many levels to it, because I think at the time, even though my business was successful, my catering company was successful, there were problems. I had a business partner who, I would say, wasn't the best business partner, and there were issues there that we didn't really discuss, but there were issues there that I was like, this is not working, this doesn't even make any sense, like how am I doing this.

Naroop 48:50

What do you mean by that, the relationship, or financially, or everything?

King 48:50

Again, so many different levels. I think when you have a business, you wear so many hats, there's so many facets to a business, and then when you introduce a business partner, because this business partner came on, not at the beginning, it came on later, and when you introduce a business partner at that stage, you give up a certain amount of equity after what you've already built. Knowing what I know now, that was a big mistake.

Naroop 49:21

How much equity did you give?

King 49:21

40%.

Naroop 49:21

40%, to someone you've never...

King 49:21

No, I knew this person, but I didn't know them, does that make sense? They talked a good game, you know. So knowing what I know now, that would never happen, it wouldn't even cross my mind. So there was stuff going on there. So we then flipped to this, for me it's like, yeah, this is us leveling up here. And not only that, I could kind of see myself moving away from that business model, I was like, this is what I like, this is what I want to do.

Naroop 49:58

Let me ask you a question, because off camera you were talking about, you're 6'4", wherever you go there's a presence, your presence, and here are two celebrities, black, and we're pretty much the same height.

King 50:13

Same height.

Naroop 50:13

But also it's the food, you're used to it. If it was a white wedding with white celebrities, do you think you would have been as cool?

King 50:18

That's a great question. At the time, probably not.

Naroop 50:31

There probably would have been some resistance there, because there's not a lot of chefs like you in this space.

King 50:37

No, there aren't. Well, there are more now, back then there weren't. There definitely would have been some resistance, I think, perhaps on the food offering, the type of food offering that I do, it's West African based, and the flavor profile, the palette, texture, everything is completely different from modern European, so there probably would have been some resistance. However, I would have found a way to weave into it, because that's what I do.

Naroop 51:07

But going in there as, I guess, because I know being a brown guy, when I was younger, I would be aware that I'm walking into something, and that affects everything. Me and my business partner, when we were deep in the photography game, we'd go and do talks at events, the photography show, the association of photographers, and everyone's white, man, there's three brown boys on stage. And I know the guy probably meant it as a compliment, but one of the guys who's quite senior in one of the associations said, you guys are like the Indian entrepreneurs.

King 51:46

No, what do you mean?

Naroop 51:50

I was like, he said that, and I was like, okay, what do you say to that? The Indian entrepreneurs, what's that, are we here to make you laugh, what does that make us, palatable now, that's it.

King 52:03

Yeah, I get what you're saying. There's definitely that nuance. I think we do come with a preconceived idea in our heads of how people view us, especially people who are not black and brown, right, and let's keep it real, it comes from a valid place. I think now I'm becoming more, I don't give a damn about that, I'm just me, take it or leave it.

Naroop 52:30

And how have you got to that space?

King 52:35

I think a lot of trial and error, and a lot of going back to the foundation of who you are, your culture, your roots, your tradition. You can't hide from that, and it's not about trying to hide from it, this is who I am. I'm 6'4", me trying to cower and not be who I am, and not tower, I'm doing myself a disservice. How dare I walk into a room and try and shrink myself to make you feel good, or to make you feel valid, or make you feel important, that's not right. Going back to who you are, your essence, and where you come from, man, I tell you, you can't pay me to do that.

That I'll forever scream from the rooftops. I'm a proud Nigerian, I'm a six foot four black man with dreads. And I always say this, if I died and came back, make me black, make me blacker. That's my thing. I love being black. I love being this man, I love being in this body,

I love being in this form, I love having this voice. That comes with self-love. It comes with leveling up. It comes with validation. It comes with your culture. It's all intrinsic, man, it's all intrinsic.

Naroop 53:49

You said something there interesting, you said it comes with self-love and it comes with validation, are they two different things?

King 53:57

They are two different things, but they do overlap.

Naroop 53:59

Talk to me about your self-love.

King 54:01

I think my self-love is definitely grown from that kid, from that 15-year-old. I think when you're fortunate enough to get to this age, and you have enough life experience behind you now, to look at things objectively or subjectively, and say, oh, now I understand that, now I understand why I was going through that, or, that boy just needed a hug, do you know what I mean? And I think I'm now easy on myself. That's when the self-love comes in, because yes, I have high expectations of me and what I do, but a lot of that was thrust upon me as well, because being an early man, being academic, you're expected to just have certain things about you, parts of your personality are supposed to become already polished.

And I walked with that. Learning to let all of that go and just be who you are is the best form of self-love. I might be the sum of all parts, but there's more, there's so much more, and it's incredible. It's like when you cut into an onion, there's so many different layers to it, there's so much more than just the outside of what it presents. And I think getting older, having the life experience, you get to love all of it. You get to a point where you're like, I like the part where I was confused, I like that person now, I can give that boy a hug. He didn't know any better, he didn't know what that meant at the time when his dad died, or he was going through that, he didn't know what that meant, now I do. That's self-love.

And watching yourself get through a part of your life where you are walking into these rooms, and people are calling your name, and they want you to be in these rooms, that's the validation part, like I said, it overlaps. When you walk into a room with a name, it's got

some weight on it. I will say that, especially now as well, people do have an expectation, like, King, first of all, it's like, who does he think he is? Obviously I didn't call myself King, that's the name my dad gave me, and I thank God he gave me that name, because I love it now. I used to hate it, can you imagine, I used to hate that. I love it now. Names hold weight, big time. And I tell you, this name that was bestowed upon me, I'm so happy, I'm so glad I got this name, and I try my best to walk into every room with that, shoulders back, head straight, confident, and self-assured. And I think, yeah, it does have gravitas when you walk into a room, and there's an expectation as well, but I can't be anything but me, this is what I get, this is what I present, I'm me, this is all I know how to be, I can't be anything else, I don't know how to be anything else, this is what you get, this is King.

Naroop 57:19

Do you ever think back and think, my dad gave me this name King, powerful, but then he also passed early, and so I had to grow into this without him, I was given this crown young, and heavy is the head that wears the crown, have you felt that?

King 57:35

I never looked at it like that, because my name, Naroop, my dad made the name up, and in Sanskrit and in Punjabi, Naroop means man's look, man's form.

Naroop 57:44

And then when you think about the work that I do now within the men's space, it's like, that's crazy how I'm doing, to lead men into improvement, self-improvement, the name, your namesake, and I'm like, yeah, my dad gave me this name, it's a namesake, it's powerful, right, and then you think back, wow, it's something quite nice about being given that, it's a gift, it's a real gift.

King 58:17

And I think, the story is, the reason why I was given this name was my dad had all girls, and then when his son came along, he wanted to bestow this name and crown him King, so here I am, and that's the name I've been given, and I love it honestly. But yeah, I never thought about it like that before, given that name, powerful name, my dad passed at a young age, and then you have to grow into it. And I guess I was trying to do that to some degree without being conscious of it.

Naroop 58:50

Yeah, that's powerful. So your work with Idris, and all the stuff that you're doing now, is fascinating, and I want to tap back into that shortly, but one thing you were talking about, again off camera, so many great conversations before we hit record.

King 59:05

Yeah, it's a warm up, man, it's a warm up.

Naroop 59:07

Was it astrology? Is that something you'd like to dive into a little, because it's, okay, men don't usually talk about this, but I'm really fascinated by what you learned about yourself through it.

King 59:15

And this is something I've delved into recently, and I'm glad that you asked that question, because you're right, a lot of men don't talk about astrology. And look, I think a lot of people get astrology misconstrued, they think it's about the star signs, and different star signs are different qualities, there's some truth to that, but then the majority of it is nonsense. Astrology, in terms of what we're talking about, is the time that you were born. Yes, the month you were born, but specifically the time you were born, and the houses in which align at the time you were born, and what your moon sign is, rising sun, sun sign, rising, where all of that is positioned at the time you were born is, honestly, incredible. When I delved into it and I found out some things, I was like, okay, well, this makes sense now, all of this makes sense.

Naroop 1:00:18

Why did you want to find out more about yourself?

King 1:00:18

I think, again, going back to what we were talking about earlier on about validation. This journey so far has been incredible and long lasting, in fact, I think I'm just getting warmed up, I'm going to be honest with you. What I wanted to know was, am I on the right path? Even though I know things have happened, great things, and some not so great things have happened, is this the right path? And just a little nod, like, yeah, you're good, keep going. That's all I wanted to know. Now with astrology, what it does is it gives you a perspective, almost a blueprint of what you've already achieved, what you haven't achieved, what you already are, and what you've brought into this life. It just made sense when I looked at it, when I got the chart, when it was explained to me, and going through

everything, it's like, of course this all makes sense now. So I was like, I got the validation I needed, I was like, yeah, this makes sense. That's the best way for me to describe it, I think. It's not all about the star signs and, oh, you've got this trait, you've got that trait. No, it's more precise, in terms of the time that you're born, where the moon is at that time, where the sun is, because you have past lives as well, and there is stuff that you carry into this life from your past life.

There are traits that you carry, and it might be the reason why you might be bossy, or you might be super organized, or you might be OCD in this area, those are some traits that you probably have had in past lives. Now with astrology, it mind maps everything for you and positions everything, so you can have a look at this, and then there are choices in which direction you want to take this. You can look at this and say, okay, do I want to let that go, because there are things that we have in our chart that don't serve us.

Naroop 1:02:30

What has there been in your life that you think hasn't served you? Because I think all men carry stuff that we don't let go of.

King 1:02:37

No, you're right. I think for me a lot of it is emotional baggage, just from growing up, stuff that's compound, and you don't need it, it's baggage, you just let it go, you don't need it. And I have a Taurus moon, which makes you quite emotional, emotionally stable, but empathetic, right, and my empathy was on 100. Like, oh, okay, cool, oh, maybe not, excuse me. I say that with experience. There are things that I am changing now, I know the alignment of where things are that I don't need, I'm not saying I don't need to be empathetic, but I'm saying I don't need to be 100% empathetic all the time, I can pull back on that. I don't always need to be in control, you know.

One of the things that came up was, perhaps in one of my past lives, the job I had was like a general, or very organized, and I'm super, ask anyone who knows me, everything's got a place, it's organized, I don't leave any stone unturned. And part of that, perhaps in this life, is to probably let go of some of that, because as much as I am organized, it takes a lot, it's a lot of brain work you've got to put into that, and you can't let up, because once you're given that, once that's bestowed upon you, it's here, you're on that pedestal, and then you put yourself on the pedestal, no, I can't fail in that area. And it's just like, well, it's not that deep, it's just not that deep. So I think for me, that's what I kind of took from this, certain things you can just relinquish.

Naroop 1:04:47

How does that serve you now, in the position that you are, because I was told about you, the first thing I was told is, he's Idris Elba's private chef, and I was like, amazing, but that's what he is, who is he?

King 1:05:03

Right, exactly, you know, so glad you said that.

Naroop 1:05:03

And it's like, okay, so, like you said before off camera, you want to inspire people through this, inspire them to chase their dreams, to follow what they need to do. What do you think stops people from doing that, especially men?

King 1:05:19

I think it's a great question. I think a lot of the stuff that stops men from being emotionally mature, and getting through these emotions, it's not even their stuff to begin with, it's stuff that's been thrust upon them by society, by their peers, by the culture, by tradition. You're a man, you're supposed to be this, that, you can't be seen to have emotion, you can't be seen to cry, you can't be seen to show that. The quicker you get through that, the quicker you get to the best parts of your life, right? How incredible is it to be vulnerable? That's strength as far as I'm concerned. When you are vulnerable, it unlocks a level of strength that not a lot of people have, because they don't want to be vulnerable, and men are not supposed to be seen as vulnerable, and I think that's detrimental.

Naroop 1:06:21

How would you explain that to someone who would never open up? Because I don't actively try to do this, but whenever I'm in a public setting, I see men, and we run men's groups and events, so I'm around men a lot, and I look at someone and I think, I wonder if that guy would be vulnerable and open up about his life, does he look like the type of man that would do it, his presence, would he do it, why would he not do it? I do that, just maybe some analyzing, maybe it's like market research, just trying to understand what it is, trying to relate.

King 1:07:06

What is it that stops one man from opening his mouth? Because it's pressure, man, it's pressure.

Naroop 1:07:15

Isn't a lot of it self pressure, isn't a lot of it, if I open up about this?

King 1:07:22

Yeah, if I open Pandora's box, I don't know what I put down. But it's fear as well, a lot of it is fear, it's fear of the unknown, and I think, look, we're human, and we do fear the unknown. Once you unlock fear, it's limitless after that, man. Once you unlock that fear, and it's hard, I'm not trying to downplay it by any stretch of the imagination, unlocking fear is hard. Do the hard things, man, do the stuff that scares you, do the stuff that you're thinking, I could never do that, do it, because what comes after that is...

Naroop 1:08:00

Yeah, and I love your attitude, because even the events you're doing now, you just do it.

King 1:08:08

I'm just going to do it, do it, do it. It scares me, do it, and even more so if it scares me, do it. That's the approach we've taken, we're just going to get it done, so do it, get it done. Because once you've done it once, it's confidence, I could do it, I've done that. You've risen the bar on yourself, you've given yourself permission to be vulnerable, to release that emotion that you had, release that fear, because then now you can go on and be fearful about something else, and then unlock that level. And then after that you unlock that level, and I call that my definition of imposter syndrome. People say, oh, imposter syndrome is, do I deserve this, you've just not done that yet, that's how I look at it. You've just not done that thing yet, but once you've done that, guess what, there'll be something else you've not done yet, then after that there'll be something else you've not done yet, and that's your imposter syndrome, because you've just not reached that level yet.

But once you do, there's another level, then once you do that, there's another level. So imagine you didn't start that journey, imagine you didn't start that, you're just sitting here below consciousness, unevolved, just sitting there in a pit of nothing. Who wants that? It takes a lot to even start that intention, because it's an avalanche when it starts, but the minute you start it, my god, what opens up for you is incredible. And that's why I think, going back to your question, fear, it's unlocking that, once you can unlock that fear, life is limitless, man, it really is limitless. Just do the stuff that scares you, do it anyway, feel the fear, do it anyway, it's a book, Susan Jeffers, *Feel the Fear and Do It Anyway*.

Naroop 1:09:54

How do you, as a chef, deal with feedback on your food? I know it's always been good, but I look at, like when you look at Gordon Ramsay shows, and they're getting told off, and tasting the food, and you're like, if I just put out one bad dish, if I did one of my pop-ups, one of my events, and I didn't get a good review, how do you make sure that doesn't knock everything that you built?

King 1:10:19

So what you've just described there is ego. You can't do this creative if you have an ego. Ego gets you to a certain part, but then you've got to abandon it.

Naroop 1:10:33

Give me your definition of ego.

King 1:10:35

Ego comes with a certain level of confidence and competence, ego will get you in a room, who you are will keep you in that room. Once you get past the ego and you relinquish that, it can serve you to a certain degree, because it's not all bad, ego is not all bad, it will serve you to a certain degree, but you've got to let it go. You cannot go into a creative space with ego, because everything you're going to take personally, every single thing you're going to nitpick and tear apart, but that's your ego doing it, and it's damaging, really damaging. So as far as I'm concerned, you can't do this and have an ego that doesn't serve you. You've got to get to a point of confidence, quiet confidence, where the edition might not be a masterpiece, but I'm okay with that, I get an opportunity to do this again.

And feedback is essential, because if something tastes bad and no one's told me, guess what I'm going to go and do, I'm going to make that again, because I'm thinking you liked it, you've told me, oh, it's incredible, but it tastes bad. So how do I learn from that, how do I evolve from that? So I relish in constructive feedback, but not when it gets to the point where people just want to be nasty, and that I have no time for.

Naroop 1:12:04

Because there's a lot of pressure, I think we were talking about this on the phone, working with celebrities, celebrity clients, cooking their food, even their entourage, you can walk into a space, and I felt it when we've done our celebrity work, energy's tight, there's a lot of ego here, there's a lot of people who think they're important, and I've got

to hormone feed and they've got to find it tasty, there's nerves, how do you prepare yourself first?

King 1:12:27

You know what, the only thing you can prepare is yourself, you can only be you, right? And let me just say, people bite into who you are first before they've even tasted your food. If you can win someone over with your personality, just who you are as you present, the food will taste a million times better. It's as simple as that. Don't get me wrong, your food has to be great at the same time, but what I'm saying to you is, it's not all about the food, it's about who you are as a person. Do they believe you, do they believe that you're worthy of cooking this food, do they believe this food that's come from you? Because if your confidence is on the floor, well, how's he cook, this can't be him, it's got to be someone else. It's down to presentation, delivery, taste, it's down to energy, it's down to all the above, but it's down to energy first, it's how you move, how you navigate through these rooms.

Naroop 1:13:14

So what's your process if you're walking into a room with a new celebrity, and he's got 15 people in a room, and there's ego and there's this bravado, and you're coming in, what do you say?

King 1:13:29

I don't match it, I just be me. One thing I don't do is match who you are, I can only ever be me at any given time, that's always what I'm going to do, everyone else has taken, so I can't be anywhere else, right, don't match it, just be you. Hey, how you doing, lovely to meet you, great, here's what I've prepared, I would have had the dietaries already, I would have had the rider, I would have had whatever the request is. Oh, I heard this was your favorite, I've made this. Okay, cool, and then try this, have you tried this before, no, why don't you try some of this? And before you know it, okay, well, can you do this? We can do that, we can do that next time, I can figure that out now. Before you know it, it's camaraderie, man. So it's all about who you are as a person, that comes first.

Naroop 1:14:16

That's really interesting, because when we were big in the photography game, and we had to shoot a celebrity, sometimes we had 30 minutes to shoot someone for a magazine cover, but our way of disarming them was always making them laugh, not taking ourselves too seriously, being relatable, because you hear about all these

photographers who've got this ego and attitude, we're just trying to make you laugh, leave it at the door, and it always works.

King 1:14:40

Yeah, it does, because think about it, they're the talent, they're expected to behave a certain way, it's their show, and then people are coming for them, they're up there already, okay, they don't want someone else walking into the room with bravado, big up their chest and all this other stuff, because then it takes the light away from them. Not to say that's what happens, but don't match it, just be you. People naturally will gravitate towards that, good people will naturally gravitate towards you and see through all the noise. Yes, there are a myriad of celebrities that I've cooked for, and you can see who these people are, but nine times out of ten, they just want you to be you, they don't want all the extra bravado, this, that, and the other, they don't want all that, they just dig you, they look at you and they're like, oh, you're a cool person, I want you around again, call that guy again, he was cool, because you're just you.

Narooop 1:15:41

What do you think most people misunderstand about you?

King 1:15:44

Okay, I'm so glad you asked that question, because I used to get, people used to call me arrogant.

Narooop 1:15:51

Could you, arrogant?

King 1:15:53

And I think there's a really...

Narooop 1:15:57

I don't see that by the way, at all.

King 1:15:57

Thank you, and I appreciate you saying that. I think there's a really distinct line between arrogance and confidence. Arrogance is, oh, look at me, all this, and you come in with your chest out, and all that, who's got time for that? Quiet confidence is walking into a room knowing who you are, without even opening your mouth, and people get it, you can be in that room and be a presence without even opening your mouth, but being quietly confident, that speaks volumes. That's a myth I hope to dispel, although I don't really get

that anymore, I used to get that a lot. It's important in what I do to have that quiet confidence, you have to, because you can't navigate in these spaces if you don't, if you go in there loud and brash, nobody wants you around, nobody wants that.

Naroop 1:16:54

Do you think you would have built that sense of quiet confidence if you didn't have these ups and downs of your career, like the business partner who tried to do you wrong, and your business closed, all the other kind of setbacks you've had, was your confidence built through riding the wave of life?

King 1:17:14

Absolutely, I think all of that is compound, and attributed to who I am today. I don't think, had my family not been through what we went through at a young age, moved to all these different houses, my dad dying, going through the part where me and my mom weren't 100%, having conflict in the family, and then dropping out of uni, going to the underground and doing all these things, they shape you. And I don't think, had I not experienced those things, it would have fashioned me to being quietly confident now. I've got a story to tell, actually, this is such a good story, I'm so glad you touched on this. So the story where I cooked, the first job I did for Idris, he called me back, it was a writer's camp, a week-long project, and it was Slick Rick and a few other producers there, and at the end of that week, it was a Friday, and I was sitting in the living room, finished everything, it was a great week, everything was great.

King 1:18:22

I remember sitting in the living room, there were four of us in the room, it was myself, Idris, Slick Rick and his wife. Slick Rick is a rapper, he's actually a UK rapper, but he resides in the States, incredible rapper, old school rapper, one of the pioneers of hip-hop, so shout out to Slick Rick. Lovely guy, by the way, and his wife, absolutely stellar. I remember sitting in that room thinking, how did I get in here? I was at the back of this room, and I remember sitting there thinking, I shouldn't be in this room, this is weird, I feel out of place. Idris was in the back there, he was getting ready for a gig, he's a DJ, he had his headphones on, doing something on his laptop, Slick Rick and his wife were just sitting on the sofa having a drink. And I'm just sitting in this room thinking, how did I get here? It was an out-of-body experience, right, and I remember sitting in this room thinking to myself, I don't deserve to be here, I shouldn't be here, how the hell did I end up in this room, this doesn't make any sense to me.

Naroop 1:19:40

Why did you feel you didn't deserve to be in that room?

King 1:19:44

I had imposter syndrome, remember I said to you earlier on, imposter syndrome is something you've never done before, so it's foreign to me, but once you've done it, you then level up. Because then after that I was like, yeah, of course there is a reason why you're here, because you work your ass off, and you were asked to come here on your merit, on what you've done, so yes, you deserve to be in this room. And then after that there was more rooms, bigger rooms, so for me that was just one of the first levels of the imposter syndrome experiences.

Naroop 1:20:17

Looking back at the young 15-year-old who had to shovel the dirt on his dad's coffin, as we come to a close of this conversation, two questions. One is, did you ever feel like you became the man of the house that they said you needed to be? And two, what do you think your dad would think of you if he was here, if he saw what you're doing now?

King 1:20:46

Powerful questions. Did I feel I became the man of the house? To this day I still don't know what that means, I can be honest with you. To this day, what does that even look like, what does the man of the house look like?

Naroop 1:21:02

Has your family leaned on you, because four sisters and a mom, have they leaned on you to be a certain male figure, to a certain degree?

King 1:21:02

Yeah, to a certain degree. My mom never remarried or anything, so I am the guy, she does come to me, but that's mom, so that goes without saying, I'm going to do it when I can. Sisters alike, if they need something, if I can do it, of course I'll do it. So, yes, essentially in essence, you do become the man of the house by default. But what does that look like, is there a picture of what that looks like? I don't know, I really don't know. And your second question was, what would my dad think of me, or do I think my dad would think of me? I think he would be like, I gave you that name, yeah, you did that. That's what I hope he'd think, I think he'd be proud of me.

Naroop 1:22:01

So now you're focusing on your supper clubs, you got your events, Smoke and Soul, tell me about that.

King 1:22:08

So, in addition to the private client work that I have, I've built a collective now, and again it's my namesake, which is Amaeke, but I call it Amake, it means remember home. My dad also gave me that name as well, it means remember home, so I've called this part of my business that. So under that umbrella I've built Smoke, which is a fire event, a chef event, where I'm at the helm of the barbecue, it's day party vibes, we have a DJ, we have cocktails, we have brand partners, and it's a celebration of just wherever you're at in life, that's just community, we come together, we have a good time, that's just vibes. And then I do supper clubs as well, where it's a shared table experience, I create, curate a menu, and then we share, we break bread together, and just again, have a communal dining experience, an elevated dining experience. So that's kind of what I'm focusing on right now.

I really enjoy it, because as much as I enjoy the private clients that I still work with, this is the fun part of it. Not that the private stuff isn't fun, but that's more regimented. I have fun with the supper clubs and the Smoke and Soul, that's where we can go over there and just chill out. So I like the balance between the two, we're growing that right now, and it's incredible, I have to say, I'm super proud of it, super proud of the team that I have, team of chefs, and everyone that rallies behind me, it's incredible.

Naroop 1:23:59

Would you see this as the start of like some global empire, like what, I'm going to say, Gordon Ramsay has done, do you see it as being more community, more creative?

King 1:24:16

I mean, look, who doesn't want it to be successful, right, who doesn't want a successful business? I'd be lying if I said, oh, I don't want it to be as big as it can get. It's starting as a community-based initiative, which I love, and I'm always going to be that, my remember home, that's my return to home, it's always going to be like that. But absolutely, I'd love it to grow, because I don't just see it being London based, I see it being based in Nigeria, I see it being based in Miami, or New York, or Dubai, or wherever, wherever we go, it's a following, and we can just drop it here, do our thing, get out, and go to the next one, that's how I see it.

Naroop 1:24:56

Love that, man, you got big vision, I think I can see you doing it.

King 1:25:02

Yeah, I'm going to do it. And it's exciting, I think this chapter, I coined the phrase, I call it my turn, this chapter is my turn.

Naroop 1:25:13

I love that. You said you want to retire at 50.

King 1:25:20

Yeah.

Naroop 1:25:21

You're 44 now, eh?

King 1:25:23

I'm going to be 44, yeah, this birthday coming.

Naroop 1:25:25

50 is young, man, you got a lot of life after that.

King 1:25:27

Well, that's the point, that's my point, I want to enjoy it, do you know what I mean?

Naroop 1:25:32

Do you not want to cook forever?

King 1:25:32

When I say retire, I don't mean stop everything, do you know what I mean, I mean I can just take a step back and just enjoy the fruits of my labor, and delve into what I want to do. When I say retire, I don't mean completely switch off, I want to go and do that, I want to be able to have the option to say, I could pick and choose what I want to do, that's what I mean.

Naroop 1:25:56

Is 60 years enough for you to get there?

King 1:25:58

I think so, I think that's decent, God willing, if we get it, we get it, I'll take it.

Naroop 1:26:05

And what does life look like after that for you?

King 1:26:05

Peace, man, sun by the water, and quiet, be still.

Naroop 1:26:17

Yeah, from quite a chaotic life.

King 1:26:21

Cuz it's a lot, it's a lot, like heavy is the head that wears the crown, I keep saying that because it's a lot, and the stuff that comes with orchestrating business, a lot of people don't see it. The stuff that goes on behind the scenes, oh my god, I'm definitely pulling up my dreads sometimes.

People don't see all that, they see the end product, they see the gloss, the high gloss finish, and it's great when it gets to that part, because that's what you want, but the stuff that comes with it, the emotional side, the financial side, the know-how, or trying to figure it out, you don't know everything, I'm still trying to figure stuff out, and sometimes you stumble, which is okay, because that's when you learn, you fail quicker so you learn. It's the sum of all parts, but above all, I'm proud of it, proud of it.

Naroop 1:27:16

Well look, man, that's been a great conversation, thank you.

King 1:27:20

Yeah, man, I like that we touched on different parts.

Naroop 1:27:23

I wanted to understand the man beneath it all, and also how you built from the childhood that you have, and what all that taught you, I think was really important.

King 1:27:33

Definitely, I agree.

Naroop 1:27:34

And I think people will leave this conversation feeling inspired.

King 1:27:40

I hope so. Thank you so much for being here, man.

PODCAST TRANSCRIPT



Narooop 1:27:40

My pleasure, appreciate you, man.