

This is the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST** with Ruth Soukup, **EPISODE NUMBER 18**. On today's episode we are going to talk with American Ninja Warrior, Allison Toepperwein, about facing life's biggest challenges head on.

Welcome to the *Do It Scared* podcast. I'm your host, **RUTH SOUKUP**, and each week on the show we will talk about how to face your fears, overcome obstacles, and, most importantly, how to take action and create a

Today's episode is brought to you by the Living Well Planner, the very best tool for managing all the pieces of your busy life and for crushing your goals. Pre-order our gorgeous new floral edition by August 31st to take advantage of our lowest price of the entire year, plus get two free amazing gifts with your purchase. You can get all the details at [livingwellplanner.com/doitscared](http://livingwellplanner.com/doitscared). Once again, order by August 31st and get all the details at [livingwellplanner.com/doitscared](http://livingwellplanner.com/doitscared).

Hey, there, and welcome back to the show. As always, my name is Ruth Soukup, and I am the founder of Living Well Spending Less and the Living Well Planner, as well as the founder of Elite Blog Academy, and the *New York Times* bestselling author of five, soon-to-be six, books.

In today's episode, we are going to be talking to American Ninja Warrior and founder of Lit Within about finding the strength to face the biggest obstacles life throws your way. You see, in December of 2014, just a few months after escaping a toxic marriage, **ALLISON TOEPPERWEIN** was diagnosed with early onset Parkinson's, a disease for which there is currently no cure. Understandably, she was devastated, but she woke up on New Year's Day with the determination to face this challenge head on. And boy, did she ever.

She discovered that exercise is the only known way to slow the progression of the disease, and she didn't just start working out; she became an American Ninja Warrior. Her story is incredibly inspiring, and her attitude will blow you away. I know it blew me away. But, of course, that's exactly what this podcast is all about. It's about realizing that no matter what obstacles life hands us, we always have a choice of how we respond, because in the end, courage doesn't mean that we are never afraid; instead, courage is being scared but taking action anyway, despite our fear. It's putting one foot in front of the other, even when we're not sure where the path is going to lead.

Okay, so just a couple more quick things before we dive into today's episode and you get to meet Allison. First, you can download our "Do It Scared" manifesto to

remind yourself to start living your own life of courage right now. You can get it for free by texting **DOITSCARED** to **44222**, or by visiting [doitscared.com/episode18](https://doitscared.com/episode18). Once again, either text **DOITSCARED**, all one word, to **44222**, to get the manifesto, or you can get the show notes and the manifesto at [doitscared.com/episode18](https://doitscared.com/episode18).

Also, if you haven't already, please be sure to rate and review the show on iTunes, and while you are there, be sure to subscribe to be notified of new episodes.

And now, without further ado, I am honored to introduce you to our next guest, Allison Toepperwein.

**RUTH:** Welcome to the show, Allison. I am so, so, so excited to have you here today.

**ALLISON:** Thank you so much for having me. I really appreciate this opportunity.

**RUTH:** You're welcome. Okay, let's just dive in, because can I just tell you that your story is so amazing and so inspiring, and I literally—I watched your video that you have on your website of your *American Ninja Warrior* audition video, and I got chills. It's incredibly inspiring, so can you just give kind of the just to start out, the rough and dirty, maybe not dirty, the rough overview of how you got to where you are, what happened, and just, yeah, lay it all out there for us.

**ALLISON:** Well, actually, my story kind of began, as far as the athletic part of it, in mud runs, so it was very dirty.

**RUTH:** That is dirty.

**ALLISON:** Essentially, August 1 of 2014, I was in a very toxic place. And in the middle of the night, I left my home; my marriage of seven and a half years; and my daughter and I—I got her in the middle of the night, at four and a half—and we went to my dad's. So I separated August 1 of 2014. Two and half months later, we were divorced.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** I got the divorce by myself, clear, cut, and dry. And then two and a half months after that, I was diagnosed on December 31 of 2014 with Parkinson's disease.

**RUTH:** Oh my gosh.

**ALLISON:** I was 37 years old. I didn't have it in my family. I knew no one, to that point, that had Parkinson's, so it was the lowest of the lows at that point. The great thing about that is it was the end of the year, the very last day of the year, of a really sucky year.

**RUTH:** Yeah, no kidding.

**ALLISON:** I went to bed at 8:00 p.m., with my daughter, cried myself to sleep while most everyone is doing champagne toasts, and the very next morning I woke up with the sun, I put my feet firmly on the ground, and I said, "This is a new year. This is a new chance and a new beginning, a new life, and I'm not going to allow this to be the end of my story."

**RUTH:** So that was it for you. The new year.

**ALLISON:** The new year. So, I ended up going to a movement-disorder specialist, which is a neurologist that specializes in movement disorders—Parkinson's, Tourette's, anything that is controlled by the brain that controls your movement.

**RUTH:** Was that somebody that your doctor had recommended, or you just were like, "I'm going to find the best person to help me with this"?

**ALLISON:** My general neurologist, when I went to him right after the new year, I had a lot of questions. I had just been diagnosed, I had a lot of questions. I had a one to two percent chance of getting Parkinson's to begin with as a young female.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**ALLISON:** And so I, you know, newly divorced. I had no prospects at that point, but I wanted to know my options and chances of being able to get pregnant again, have a baby; for my child that I have, is this a death sentence? What did my future look like for her? How am I going to be able to-

**RUTH:** So scary.

**ALLISON:** -as a single parent care for and maintain a life with my child?

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**ALLISON:** And so these were questions that I had, and as a general neurologist, whose median age for treating Parkinson's is 65-year-old man, and that wasn't my demographic.

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm. So it's really, really uncommon for, because you had, what's it called? Early onset? Young onset.

**ALLISON:** Early onset or young onset. And so because of those reasons, he referred me to Dr. Joseph Jankovic, who works for Baylor College of Medicine in Houston, and he has written over 1,000 papers,

research papers, on Parkinson's.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow.

**ALLISON:** He's one of the best, if not the best, in the world. If I had any questions, he would be able to answer them pretty much better than anyone else.

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm..

**ALLISON:** So I went to him, and the very first visit, he gave me prescriptions, of course, but at the very first visit he said, "Get moving. Exercise is the only thing that's proven to slow the progression. This is a progressive, non-curable-at-this-point, disease." So I'm looking for anything that will keep me in my daughter's life, functioning, for as long as possible.

**RUTH:** Yeah, no kidding.

**ALLISON:** I thought, "Exercise is something that I can control." I had lost a lot of weight from my divorce. I went from 123 pounds at 5'7", which is thin, to 100 pounds.

**RUTH:** Oh my goodness.

**ALLISON:** So, I looked like I was dying. Parkinson's, not only does it give you a tremor, but you have balance issues and fatigue in strength, so couple that with weight loss and depression, you know, I was moving very slowly.

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm.

**ALLISON:** So I went to the local track, my old high school track that I grew up running on, and I started walking the bleachers. With balance issues, you're thinking, "Why would you do that?" But I held onto the rail, and I did it slow, and I just built from that. And I found that I really enjoyed going and working out, that it became my best therapy. It was my safest medicine because it actually gave me a dopamine boost, and I was able to have more energy because of exercise.

**RUTH:** Because you were doing that. So even though you thought it could be draining for you, it was the opposite effect.

**ALLISON:** Absolutely. So the more I went, the better I got, the more energy I had, the faster I got. So I began running the track. I started jogging just a lap, and by the end of the summer of 2015, now we're a year after the separation, I was running 10 seconds slower than my fastest time in high school.

**RUTH:** Oh wow.

**ALLISON:** At almost 40 years old.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** So through that, I entered a little fun run. It was a fundraiser for the local youth to go to the Olympics, Junior Olympics. So I went, and amongst women, children, and men, I ran the 400. I came in first, and I got a trophy.

**RUTH:** Wow. So it was like a track meet for, just like a fun-run track-meet-type thing.

**ALLISON:** Yes.

**RUTH:** That's amazing.

**ALLISON:** They had no idea that I had Parkinson's.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** So that was a lot of fun. And then about a month later, I ran into a couple. We were floating down the river, which is what you do in the summer in Texas, and he was talking about a mud run. He was in the military, and said, "It's military style, you know. You look fit. You should try out. Try to do it."

**RUTH:** So he said that not knowing what you were dealing with.

**ALLISON:** Not knowing. Then he talked about an Adonis, his best friend is an Adonis, a doctor, 6'4", gorgeous. I'm like, "And I'm in." I've never done a mud run, but I'm in. So I paid \$100 to do this mud run, and I'm cheap.

**RUTH:** So that was good incentive to stick it out.

**ALLISON:** That was good incentive. So I never met the Adonis. I never actually found him, the guy that I originally met.

**RUTH:** Oh, I thought for sure that was going to be the next part of your story.

**ALLISON:** No, unfortunately, no. There's a meme that says I drink wine to get over my poor choices in men. That would sum up my life. So I signed up for the mud run, and I thought there's a lot of upper body strength that needs to come from this. So I went to the gym, and I thought I probably ...

**RUTH:** Yeah, those mud runs are scary. They're scary.

**ALLISON:** Yeah, I thought I probably need to do a pull up, so I attempted a pull up, and I ended up doing five in a row.

**RUTH:** Wow. You're strong.

**ALLISON:** I had never had that before, so I was kind of shocked, and so I posted a video of that online. You know, on social media posted a couple of videos of me playing on my daughter's jungle gym at her elementary. That was my training for this mud run. And through that, I had several little angels sit on my shoulder, and through social media and different means, they were all telling me the same thing: you look like an American Ninja Warrior.

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** And I thought, "Hm, okay." So I thought, "Well, let me do this mud run first. You know, I've never done one of these before. Let me do this first, and then that'll tell me whether or not I should do *American Ninja Warrior*." About two weeks before the mud run, and the mud run was November 1, I woke up in the middle of the night with a great deal of pain, went to the restroom, blood everywhere. I was passing kidney stones.

**RUTH:** Oh my goodness. Oh, oh, that's not good.

**ALLISON:** So I passed five kidney stones in the two weeks leading up to the race. The last one was on Wednesday, and I competed on Saturday.

**RUTH:** No way.

**ALLISON:** So that was going on. I had tendonitis in both hips, my Parkinson's, and I already shake, so that's a major symptom of Parkinson's. I cannot deal with cold weather. On Saturday, November 1—and actually I say it was November 1, it may have been November 7, but it was in the beginning of November. In Texas, all bets are off as far as weather, it could be, you know, 100 degrees, or it could be 20 degrees. And that day, it was 50 degrees with rain the entire day.

**RUTH:** Oh, that sounds miserable.

**ALLISON:** That plus a mud run, I'm guaranteed to be wet and cold, but I paid \$100, and I was hoping ...

**RUTH:** Gosh darn it, you were going to get your money's worth.

**ALLISON:** I was hoping for that Adonis, so I competed in the race. The entire time, I just told myself, "Slow and steady, slow and steady, slow and steady wins the race." I kept passing people, mainly men, and out of 1,400 people, I finished the race fourth in my age division and in the top 13% overall.

**RUTH:** Wow. That's amazing. That's amazing. With all of the stuff that you had just gone through.

**ALLISON:** Right.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** So I thought I'm never doing this again.

**RUTH:** I don't blame you.

**ALLISON:** But I have since done it several times.

**RUTH:** Have you done it again? That's amazing.

**ALLISON:** Yes.

**RUTH:** You're like a glutton for punishment.

**ALLISON:** Yes. The problem is, I have this terrible memory, obviously, because I don't remember the pain of the prior time, but I give it enough time in between. The internal optimist, this time's going to be different.

**RUTH:** This time it's not going to suck.

**ALLISON:** Yes. Then, you know, that was at the beginning of November. By the end of November, I was really hearing the, "You should try out for *American Ninja Warrior*."

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm.

**ALLISON:** And I thought, "Okay, this'll be simple." Then I went on Groupon, and I saw a Groupon for two sessions at American Ninja Warrior gym.

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** And I thought, "Okay."

**RUTH:** I didn't even know there was such a thing.

**ALLISON:** Yes.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** They're apparently rampant.

**RUTH:** Really?

**ALLISON:** It's the biggest trend in fitness. So I thought, "Okay, God's shining down on me. He's telling me you should be on *American Ninja Warrior*."

**RUTH:** It's time. Because He knew you were cheap, so you wouldn't have done it without a Groupon.

**ALLISON:** He spoke to me. So I got the two sessions, and I thought—this was how naïve I was—I thought, "Okay, I'm going to use one to shoot my video, and then if I get the call, I'll use the other to train."

**RUTH:** Oh, that's funny.

**ALLISON:** So I went the day before the video was due, and I walked in. It was a Saturday, and there was 17-, 18-year-old kids. They were thin and lanky. They looked like they came from their basement, playing video games, and I thought, "I got this. I got this." And that was until we stretched, and everyone got on apparatuses. And before I knew it, these kids are scaling the walls and ceilings, hanging from the rafters, and you know, it was like I'm in over my head. Clearly, I'm not qualified for this.

**RUTH:** Oh, my goodness. Oh, my goodness.

**ALLISON:** So I looked at the gym owner, and I told him, I said, "I need to tell you something. I have Parkinson's, and that has limited my ability to utilize my left arm." And he goes, "You're strong enough. You got this. Just let go."

**RUTH:** Huh. So he wasn't going to feel sorry for you.

**ALLISON:** No. And so after an hour and a half ...

**RUTH:** At that moment, when you said that, were you thinking was that kind of your, I don't know, your qualifier? Like qualifying for yourself, if I can't do this, this is why? Or were you not really thinking about it that way?

**ALLISON:** When he said, "Just let go," I thought, "He doesn't know what I'm dealing with," but he was so spot on by saying "just let go," because in so many aspects of our life, we try and hold on to it and control the situation, and we think we know best, when really

we just need to let go and let be and realize that when we let go, we can fly.

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm. Wow. So what happened?

**ALLISON:** I didn't let go that time.

**RUTH:** Really?

**ALLISON:** I waited, because—so we did an hour-and-a-half session, and at the end of the session, I was shaking. I said, "I'm sorry that I'm shaking. I have a tremor." He said, "All of my workouts make anybody shake." And that made me feel so much better because it was a strenuous workout. So it took me about a month to go back to that gym. The second time, I was able to accomplish nun-chucks.

**RUTH:** What are nun-chucks?

**ALLISON:** Nun-chucks are nun-chucks that hang in a line, and I was able to swing from one to the other.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow.

**ALLISON:** So then the rings are rings that you swing like a monkey from one to the other. That was the original obstacle that I wanted to accomplish. Still wasn't able to do it the second time, but the third go around, I let go, and I flew.

**RUTH:** Ah. Ah.

**ALLISON:** I had a friend that was with me. I told her that was the first thing that I attempted that day. I said, "Film me." I said, "I'm not going to be able to do this, but just film me just in case." And I flew ...

**RUTH:** And you did it.

**ALLISON:** I did the whole obstacle, and came down screaming. I had people rush to me, thinking that I was hurt.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** I was like, "No! I accomplished something."

**RUTH:** You're just so happy. That's amazing.

**ALLISON:** The amazing thing, when you accomplish an obstacle like that, is you get a rush of dopamine, which, when you have Parkinson's, you lack dopamine.

**RUTH:** Oh. I didn't know that.

**ALLISON:** Yes.

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** So the more obstacles that I overcame, the more dopamine that was produced.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**ALLISON:** So *Ninja* became my medicine. It was not just preventing the progression of my disease, but it was also replenishing what I was missing.

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm.

**ALLISON:** And so I had sent the video off, and the application, and I waited. I trained, and I found it addicting.

**RUTH:** So you kept going back even though you didn't have any more Groupons.

**ALLISON:** I kept going back. I paid full price. Actually, I think I bought as many Groupons as they allowed-

**RUTH:** Oh, that's funny.

**ALLISON:** -and then finally bit the bullet and got a membership. Most people around me, this is something that I read a lot about, whenever you try and do something that's a little bit different, that's a little bit big, most people don't get it. They don't understand it. They don't know how to support it, but you just keep plugging away. I knew there was something to this. By this point, I had been blogging, and I was writing for the *Huffington Post*.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow.

**ALLISON:** So I started blogging about my experience with *Ninja* and how it was really empowering me to just really just give me power, power to move freely, and I found my balance improving tremendously-

**RUTH:** Oh, wow.

**ALLISON:** -my cognition and memory improving, my movement improving, my strength improving, my fatigue, all these things that I was doing was unheard of in the Parkinson world.

**RUTH:** Really?

**ALLISON:** So it was in the beginning of April, I got the call. And I was the first person with Parkinson's to ever even think about *American Ninja Warrior*, and I was going to be on the show.

**RUTH:** Yeah, I bet. Amazing. Amazing.

**ALLISON:** So to bring you up to current day, essentially I competed in 2016 and 2017.

**RUTH:** Amazing.

**ALLISON:** My story aired in 2016, and since then, I have several people with Parkinson's beginning to go to Ninja gyms, and Jimmy Choi is now a two-time American Ninja Warrior because him and his daughter watched me on TV. She said, "What's your excuse? Now you can do it."

**RUTH:** That's amazing.

**ALLISON:** I had a gentleman who watched me on TV on Monday, and on Tuesday, showed up to my gym-

**RUTH:** No way.

**ALLISON:** -asking about me, and had been working out ever since at the gym.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow. Wow.

**ALLISON:** It was amazing the amount of power that I was able to give just by telling my story.

**RUTH:** Mm-hmm. So, so true. That's amazing. How has it been with your symptoms? How has it been with your symptoms ever since you've been doing that? You're obviously continuing to train and do that pretty intensely, just as intensely as you were when you were training for the show, and how has that affected the Parkinson's?

**ALLISON:** So since last year, because of a shift in my life, I went from working for my dad, living with my dad, to now working for a cancer center here in Houston, the Daniel Duncan Comprehensive Cancer Center with Baylor College of Medicine. It was a four-and-a-half-hour commute, round trip every day, so that was taking time away from my daughter, so her and I moved into town to be closer to my job. Being a single mom with all that that encompasses, it doesn't really allot the time that I need to train as heavily as I was, but I found that since then, everything has improved dramatically.

**RUTH:** Really?

**ALLISON:** I've had symptoms for eight years, at least eight years, and most people with Parkinson's, by this point they're looking for disability. They're part time or not working at all. They're certainly not living on their own, and their mood, they're usually depressed because of Parkinson's but then also because of all that is slowly being taken away from them. I drive everywhere. I take care of my daughter. She is never late for school. I work full time. My memory and cognition has improved. I mean, I am fully functioning.

**RUTH:** That's amazing. What does your doctor say, your neurologist say about all of this?

**ALLISON:** He calls me super woman.

**RUTH:** Does he?

**ALLISON:** Yes. I still do stupid stuff. Like last summer, I pulled a jeep with a trailer attached with a bunch of—it was filled with workout equipment. I pulled it with a harness 100 feet. He said, "Why would you?"

**RUTH:** Just for fun?

**ALLISON:** Just for fun.

**RUTH:** Just because you could.

**ALLISON:** Because it was—it was a stupid little video.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow. That is really dumb.

**ALLISON:** He said, when I showed him, he goes, "Why would you do that?" I said, "Because it makes for a cool video." And he said, "Yes, it does. Please send me that."

**RUTH:** That's amazing. That's amazing.

**ALLISON:** Yes, I'm one of—I don't have know how many he has, but I know I am definitely one of his prized patients. He does lectures, discussing me and my lack of progression, and he tells everybody about me, because anyone that I meet in his office, be it patients or new staff, they all go, "Oh, you're the one that I was supposed to meet."

**RUTH:** Oh. Because he talks about you.

**ALLISON:** So, he brags about me. You know, the only thing that I can say is

I'm not different from anyone else in the way of my circumstance, but it's how I chose to react to it that-

**RUTH:** I love that.

**ALLISON:** -has really defined my character, my health, my ability.

**RUTH:** It's the something I tell my kids all the time and I've talked about on this podcast, too, is that you can never choose what happens to you; you can only ever choose your response. And you do have control. You're the perfect example, actually, of somebody who has—so many people would take that diagnosis that you got, especially on top of a divorce, being a single mom, just so many things that had you down, and go, "That's it. I'm giving up. There's nothing left for me." You felt sorry for yourself for what, like four hours? Then woke up the next day, and you're like, "Okay, now I have to deal with this head on." And you have. That's amazing, and you're right. Not very many people have that inner strength to be able to do that, especially to make that turnaround as quickly as you did. So what do you think was, I mean have you always been like that? Is that kind of just your personality? Was there something inside of you that just clicked? What was it that made all the difference for you?

**ALLISON:** So, I actually just posted this on social media. I think it was last week. I'll never forget the moment. So I was diagnosed on the 31st, but it was December 3 when I actually was told by the neurologist, "Yes, I think you have Parkinson's." The reason why I was diagnosed the last day of the year is so that insurance could pay for some of it—it certainly didn't pay for the majority of it—but December 3. So for about a month I had this lingering over me as to I possibly have this non-curable disease.

And I remember sitting at the kitchen table, and it was my dad, his life partner, and my brother. So my dad's girlfriend and my brother, at the same time, we're sitting across from each other. I said, you know, in a very smart-aleck way, "It's not like my life could get any worse." And they both looked at me and in unison said, "Oh, you're very blessed. Your life could get much worse." And that really stuck with me.

So when I was diagnosed, it was like, this is bad, but there's always somebody worse. When I got on my medicine that is the gold standard for Parkinson's, it's Sinemet, and one of the major symptoms that I had, or side effects that I had, from this initially was nausea. It would come on in an instant, and I couldn't get to the restroom quick enough. And I remember always hanging my head over the toilet, and as I'm throwing up, thinking, "It's not

chemo. This isn't cancer."

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** So really looking at my blessings has been the biggest help for me in overcoming anything. I really appreciate all that I have. When I first separated, I wanted to have more babies. About a year later, I realized instead of wanting what you don't have, really appreciate what you do have, which is a beautiful, precious, loving, kind, bright, little baby girl. I mean, she's contagious. Anybody that meets her just falls in love with her.

**RUTH:** And how old is she now?

**ALLISON:** She's eight.

**RUTH:** Eight. That's such a fun age. I have an eight-year-old, too. It's the best.

**ALLISON:** She broke her arm. She fractured it over spring break, and she was about to get her cast off—it would've been on a Tuesday—and she came down that Saturday night, and I was like, "Emma, you need to go to bed. I already put you down. It's late, and we need to go to church tomorrow." She goes, "Mommy, I think I need to show you something." She had pulled her cast off.

**RUTH:** Oh, no.

**ALLISON:** She's a character. I went, "What did you do?" And then I just started laughing.

**RUTH:** Oh, my goodness.

**ALLISON:** You know I just really, every day that I wake up is a blessed day, you know? You never know what tomorrow brings. Something that I've realized, tomorrow is not promised for any of us.

**RUTH:** Nope.

**ALLISON:** And so today, I'm going to take today and try and live it the biggest, best life that I possibly can so that if I die, I have no regrets.

**RUTH:** Mm. That's an amazing attitude. Was there ever a time where you felt scared of all of this, and how did you deal with that? How did you deal with just the fear of the unknown?

**ALLISON:** So the very first time that I went to a Parkinson's event, it was put on by the Fox Foundation. Michael J. Fox is the poster child for

Parkinson's, whether he wanted to be or not. I went to this event, and beforehand I was really nervous and really scared because I knew I would see people that were much more progressed than I am. Every once in a while, when I see someone with PD that is far progressed, it's a little bit of a punch in the gut because that is the possibility, but that's not what I concentrate on.

I'm the type of person that I can dwell on things. They can eat me alive, you know? I can worry myself into a frenzy. And I think most people are like that, so you have to really set up boundaries for yourself. For me, my boundary is I shut that possibility out, because it's a possibility; it's not promised. I'm doing things that no one with Parkinson's ever did before, so who's to say that that's going to be me. And I have hope that I'm going to be cured. I put it out there. I'm going to be cured. I'm cured. I feel like if you believe it, if you put it out there, if that's how you live your life, you're going to be much better off, both mentally and then also physically through that kind of thinking.

**RUTH:** That's incredible. I love that attitude.

**ALLISON:** Thank you.

**RUTH:** What is the research and stuff, what have they found with Parkinson's? There's still no cure. Have they come further along? Are they close to a cure? What's all that about?

**ALLISON:** So there is still no cure. They are constantly, every day coming out with new studies, new drugs, new therapies. Right now, a major therapy that is working as far as accommodating the symptoms is DBS, or deep brain stimulation, and basically it's brain surgery. They implant nodes into your brain, and it has a box that is in your chest. Essentially what it is, is similar to a pace maker where it shocks your heart; this shocks your brain. You don't feel the shocks, but it stimulates the parts of your brain to give you your movement back, to prevent the tremor from-

**RUTH:** Oh, wow.

**ALLISON:** -helping with your balance and gait, that sort of thing, your physical symptoms. I don't believe that it does much for your non-physical symptoms, so, like, your mood, any sort of, you know, depression, I believe, is still a big issue when you have DBS.

I was interested in it because the medicine that I take, Sinemet, creates a different movement issue, which is called dyskinesia. So my tremor was eliminated, but then I was left with a twisting motion of my arm.

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** The Sinemet helps with other issues, like slowness, rigidity, that kind of thing, so the benefits of taking Sinemet still outweighed the side effects, but dyskinesia was really bothersome to me, but my doctor recently put me on a different, well an added medication, to combat the dyskinesia. It actually helps the Sinemet work better.

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** But before that medication, when I inquired about DBS, he laughed at me. He said, "You're nowhere near needing that."

**RUTH:** Really? Needing that.

**ALLISON:** Because it is a very invasive surgery. It's brain surgery.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**ALLISON:** So there are new medications, and the added medication that I'm on just got approved by the FDA in the fall, so it's brand new. There are, as far as, like, cures, there's immunotherapy, which is really being utilized in cancer, because I work for a cancer center. There's people that have been cured from stage IV lung cancer.

**RUTH:** Really?

**ALLISON:** We have a patient that was given 39 days to live. She went through chemo; radiation, to no avail; and has been cancer free since 2015 with immunotherapy.

**RUTH:** Really.

**ALLISON:** And essentially, it's your body—this drug increases your body's immune system to the point where your body fights off the cancer, or in this case, my Parkinson's.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow. Yeah. So they're starting to use that as well.

**ALLISON:** Well, they're starting to do clinical trials for that. There's also several drugs that, you know, are thought to possibly cure Parkinson's that are typically used in cancer. So, a leukemia drug that has been prescribed and shown amazing things for leukemia, it's already FDA approved, it's already out on the market. They're just in phase II studies, I believe, to see if that is effective for Parkinson's.

**RUTH:** Oh, wow.

**ALLISON:** So there's a lot of things that are very exciting-

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**ALLISON:** -on the forefront. I'm young, I'm slowly progressing, if at all, so I'm very hopeful for the future.

**RUTH:** That's amazing. So what, tell me a little bit about, you've started a nonprofit organization.

**ALLISON:** Mm-hmm.

**RUTH:** So tell me a little bit about that and what you're working on right now that has you really fired up.

**ALLISON:** Well, so Lit Within was my blog; it started as the name of my blog. And I continued to be guided by several different angels telling me I needed to have a nonprofit, so I began the nonprofit, and it's also called Lit Within. Lit Within's mission is to empower single women, in particular single moms, in overcoming obstacles in however, whichever obstacles that is.

**RUTH:** I love that.

**ALLISON:** So, you know, by the symbolism of overcoming physical obstacles, it helps you to better understand and be able to fight back and overcome those obstacles that everyone deals with in life.

**RUTH:** Amazing. Amazing. Where can people find this online?

**ALLISON:** Litwithin.com, but I'm redoing my website, so I'm going to be launching this summer my new blog as well as the website. It'll be all encompassing. What I'm really fired up right now about is I wrote a children's book.

**RUTH:** Really?

**ALLISON:** Through my journey with Parkinson's, I began drawing. I was always creative in the past. I called myself very crafty, but painting and drawing were never anything that I was able to do. I wanted to do, but I just told myself that I couldn't do it. It was about a year later—it was in 2015—my daughter needed something for school. It was a picture disguising a turkey for Thanksgiving. So I said, "Well, what do you want me to draw?" The Disney Channel was on. She said Minnie Mouse. I'm like, I can do this. So I found a picture online, and I drew it, and I thought, "That's pretty darn good." Then she became my muse, and my sixth drawing is of her, sixth and seventh drawing are of her, and they're really quite spectacular for somebody whose never been trained.

**RUTH:** Yeah.

**ALLISON:** They remarkably look like her.

**RUTH:** Wow.

**ALLISON:** When I got into my head that I wanted to write a children's book, I also wanted to illustrate it. So essentially it's a true story. It's called *The Mira Cat*, and Mira is our cat.

**RUTH:** Love it.

**ALLISON:** The back story of *The Mira Cat*, which, like I said, the children's story is based upon this, the day after, it was December 4, the day after the doctor said, "I think you have Parkinson's," I'm broken. I go into my father's shop, and I was working, and I walked out into the main part of the shop where our employees were. I see something moving out of the corner of my eye. I thought, "Hm. Is that a rat?" Then I saw it hopping, and I thought it was a bunny, and it turns out it was a little eight-week-old kitten, and so I took her to the vet. The vet said that she had two crushed hips-

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** -and that he could try and do surgery but it probably wouldn't help. He said, "It doesn't look like she's in pain. She'll just be a lame little kitty." So here I'm broken. Here's this little kitten who's broken, and she grew. We kept her in the shop because my dad didn't like cats. She would kill rats the same size as her. She would trap mice. One time she had a box with two mice and two lizards in it; she was taunting. I have video of her killing a snake, playing with a snake.

**RUTH:** So, basically, crazy cat.

**ALLISON:** Crazy cat. She would shoot up a ladder. She would jump off of it, the second story.

**RUTH:** No way.

**ALLISON:** Then one day, I was waiting to move into Houston, and she was on top of my dad's warehouse building, which is two stories up in the air, and my daughter is crying and, "Oh no, what about Mira?" I said, "Cats always land on their feet." And like a superhero, she jumps off the top of the building-

**RUTH:** No way.

**ALLISON:** -and lands on her two feet.

**RUTH:** Uh-uh. Amazing.

**ALLISON:** So I took her to the vet. Got her shots. Got her de-wormed and everything for the move, and asked the vet, "So how did she heal?" He felt around and he said, "She's not healed. You can feel right here. Her hips are still crushed."

**RUTH:** Oh, my goodness. She just deals with it.

**ALLISON:** So here we both were broken. I'm a two-time American Ninja Warrior; she's Mira, the miracle cat.

**RUTH:** Oh.

**ALLISON:** And we're proof that we never really were broken because we never thought that we were broken.

**RUTH:** I love it. Oh my gosh, that's amazing. What a good story. Your book, and you've done your book? Your children's book?

**ALLISON:** I've done it. I just am in the process of finding a literary-

**RUTH:** Publisher.

**ALLISON:** -agent and publisher.

**RUTH:** Amazing. That's exciting.

**ALLISON:** Yes. I see it being in children's hospitals, but just in children's hands and in their eyes to know that if you have a disability, it doesn't matter.

**RUTH:** No.

**ALLISON:** If your friend has a disability, it doesn't matter, but how you see yourself determines your path.

**RUTH:** I love that so much. That's a great note to end on.

**ALLISON:** Thank you.

**RUTH:** Thank you so much, Allison, for sharing your story today. It's amazing. You're so inspiring. I love the story of your cat, and it's just, there's so many people in your situation who would just want to give up, and the fact that you just said, "Nope, I'm not going to let this break me," or, "If I'm already broken, I don't have to let it keep me broken." That's really, really inspiring.

**ALLISON:** Thank you.

**RUTH:** Is there any final words of wisdom that you want to share?

**ALLISON:** Just keep looking up because that's where it all is.

**RUTH:** I love it. Thank you so much.

**ALLISON:** Thank you. You have a wonderful day.

**RUTH:** Thanks, you, too.

Okay, so don't forget that if you would like to grab our "Do It Scared" manifesto, you can get it for free. You can download it now and get the show notes at [doitscared.com/episode18](https://doitscared.com/episode18), or you can text **DOITSCARED**, all one word, to **44222** right now. Once again, you can get the show notes and our "Do It Scared" manifesto at [doitscared.com/episode18](https://doitscared.com/episode18), or you can text **DOITSCARED** to **44222** on your phone right now to get just the manifesto.

Then before we go, I just want to say, as always, that I love hearing from you. So please email me if you have any questions about what we talked about today, any other topics that you want to see me talk about on the *Do It Scared* podcast, or any "do it scared" stories you want to share with me, people you'd like to see me interview, you can either email me or you can fill out our form at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com).

And that about does it for this episode of the **DO IT SCARED PODCAST**. Thank you again for joining me today, and if you liked what you heard, please be sure to leave a review on iTunes or Google Play or wherever you listen, and then also be sure to also share a screenshot of your review at [doitscared.com](https://doitscared.com) for a chance to win "Do It Scared" T-shirts and mugs. And be sure to subscribe wherever you listen so that you can always be notified of new episodes.

And speaking of upcoming episodes, be sure to join me next week as we talk about something that Allison has learned very, very well: that your "why" needs to be stronger than your fear. We're going to talk about how to go about finding your why and how that will create the motivation that you need to do things that you never thought you'd be capable of. It is powerful stuff, and it's kind of a game changer, so don't miss this one, guys. I will catch you then.