

EPISODE 153

“LS: I think with the fact that my parents were Holocaust survivors, I definitely find it easy to feel like a victim, especially when something is really unjust, whether you get turned down from a pitch, or if someone really did something that was grossly unfair, like promises made where they distribute your movie and they don't distribute your movie, it's easy to feel hurt. But what I've found is that with gratitude, I can stop that feeling. I can put it on pause when I ask myself, what can I be grateful for? The fact that I'm breathing, the fact that I can move my fingers.

I also reflect on what my parents went through, which is a lot tougher than what I'm going through at the moment. Shit, I got rejected, get over it. I learned that late in life, because it's easy to get riled up when you know that something is really unjust, socially unjust, especially. But to have that anger and victimhood inside of you, you realize you're only hurting yourself.”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:01:06] LW: Hello, friends, and welcome back to the Light Watkins Show, where I interview ordinary folks, just like you and me who've taken extraordinary leaps of faith in the direction of their path, their purpose, or what they've identified with as their mission. In doing so, they've been able to positively impact and inspire the lives of many other people who've either heard about their story, or who witnessed them in action, or who've directly benefited from their work.

This week on the show, I am honored to be in conversation with the creator of one of my favorite documentaries that I've seen on Netflix in the last year or two. It's a documentary called Fantastic Fungi, which I'm sure many of you also saw, came out in 2019. I fell in love with both the documentary and with mushrooms after watching it. The creator behind the documentary, his name is Louie Schwartzberg, and he has recently created another documentary about one of my personal favorite subjects, gratitude. It's called Gratitude Revealed. But you can't watch it on Netflix right now. You have to watch it on a platform that Louie created specifically to spread more positivity in the world. It's a streaming platform called The Louie Channel.

In this interview, we of course go deep into Louie's back story of how he became a filmmaker. Even way before that, he was the son of two Holocaust survivors, who only knew each other for a couple of weeks before they got married. The first thing they wanted to do was have kids. We talked about him growing up in Brooklyn and all of the unlikely events that inspired him to get into documentary filmmaking during college. We talked about how he discovered time lapse photography and then how he innovated it.

He actually became the first person in the world to create time lapse images on a 35-millimeter camera. This was back in the 1970s. We discussed how his earlier projects gave rise to the documentary, *Fantastic Fungi*, which was about 15 years in the making and why he decided to distribute that documentary himself and then how he did it. He details the strategy that he used to spread the word about it, and it was fascinating. He talked about why community was one of his most important marketing tools.

We also discussed which learnings he applied from *Fantastic Fungi* to *Gratitude Revealed* and why he's so excited about making the invisible visible. There were just a lot of gems during this conversation, so much wisdom from literally, decades of experience in the front lines of creating something beautiful. If you're into documentary films, or if you're a nature lover, or if you could just use a little bit more gratitude in your life, I think you're going to get a ton of value from listening to this conversation. Without further ado, let's get right to it. Here is my conversation with creator extraordinaire, Louie Schwartzberg.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:04:29] LW: Louie, thanks so much for coming on to the podcast. I'm super excited about diving into your backstory and your work and just enlightening my audience on what you've been excited about lately.

[0:04:41] LS: Great to be here with you.

[0:04:43] LW: I like to start my conversations off talking about the early days and you have a very, very fascinating backstory. I guess, we can start with your parents and their backstory, because I've never heard that before, like someone surviving Auschwitz for, was it six years, or eight years or something? Your mother?

[0:04:58] LS: Five years. Yeah. I'm sure happy to start there. I mean, I grew up in Brooklyn and my parents were Holocaust survivors, which was really unique, because I grew up and Yiddish was really my first language. Given the fact that they had gone through one of the most horrific experiences of anybody in history, I love the fact that they also had a lot of joy, love and hope in their life. They appreciated all the little things. I mean, for them having a little apartment in Brooklyn, a roof over your head, food on the table, a steady job, the miracle of having being able to have children, given the soup that my mom was given to make her sterile. All these things, they were extraordinarily grateful for.

We never went on vacation. They were just happy to be home. That really imbued in me a couple of things, appreciating the little things in life and also, being grateful for all the little things that come across your way. Also, I think it's why I love to tell the stories of people who overcome adversity, but have a lot of joy and hope in your lives, people that are resilient. Those are the stories I love to tell.

[0:06:14] LW: I'm sure you're familiar with Man's Search for Meaning, right, Viktor Frankl, but he quotes Nietzsche and saying that, a person who has a why can survive almost anything. I'm just wondering, did your mom ever reveal how she survived five years in Auschwitz? What does she do? What was her philosophy?

[0:06:32] LS: Yeah. I think that her way to fight back was to bear witness, to be able to survive and tell the story. I think, that's what gave her the stamina to prove severe, because think about it, that's the only weapon you had. The tattoo on her forearm, it was something that she was proud to talk about. She actually went to a lot of schools, talked about her experience. Everybody was fascinated about the tattoo and the numbers. She had a very low number, because she was one of the earlier people that were brought into Auschwitz.

Yeah, she just had that attitude like, "I'm going to show them by telling my truth." I think that's through – you probably know anyone who's involved in the struggle, in a movement, civil rights movement, right? I mean, the only way to fight back is to tell your story and to share the brutality that may have been put upon you, that people don't know about. Like, what happened when they threw you in jail? Martin Luther King is a good example of that, that beautiful letter that he

wrote when they threw him in jail, talking about freedom and democracy. Telling your story is the most powerful way to fight back.

[0:07:49] LW: When you were growing up with your sister, having parents who survived all of that, I know you said they were hopeful, but did they echo any specific ideologies, or philosophies to you and your sister, things that you remembered from growing up? Like, you have to work hard, or you have to be present, or appreciate the little things? Anything like that when you guys were kids?

[0:08:08] LS: No, not really. There was nothing that they actually messaged in that way. However, indirectly they did. Because what happened is I became the parent to them, because they had been damaged. They suffered. They were immigrants. I'm the one that would really help them understand the customs, told them, well, what is a PTA meeting? I mean, it came from let's say, my mom came from a small town in Poland, let's say, growing up in 1930, 1940. Also, they just even socially, they didn't know anything about being a teenager, being rebellious, dating, because they were ripped out of that world when they were 15, 16-years-old and went into a war and had to survive.

There were a lot of things that they didn't go through. Then I realized looking back, I definitely was the parent. Plus, I had to be a good boy. I couldn't inflict any drama, or trauma on them, knowing what they went through. It forced me and my sister to really tow the line.

[0:09:19] LW: You ended up at UCLA in the film program. Why? What was your idea of success as an adult and why did you choose that path?

[0:09:28] LS: When I went to UCLA, I entered as a history poli-sci major. I wanted to really make the world a better place, heal the world, because when you grow up knowing that your parents and then all of their friends were also survivors, growing up in San Diego and all my friends had parents who were survivors. Obviously, you want to make the world a better place and fight for social justice.

What happened as soon as I got to UCLA, there was the anti-war protest were going on. I quickly learned photography. I had to take a photography class. We didn't have iPhones back then. I mean, the only people that did photography were like, remember, wedding

photographers. You may not remember. But wedding photographers and hobbyists and maybe a journalist. Anyway, I quickly learned photography and I documented the protests, especially the police brutality, like watching these cops beat up on women as well. It was like, for me, symbolic of the same thing my parents did. You had to tell your story, record the event in order to share it.

I did these photo essays, which I submitted to my poli-sci class, which was a lot easier than writing a paper. I found my voice. I fell in love with it. From filming those protests, but then I fell in love with filming nature and that took me on a whole other mind-expanding journey.

[0:11:03] LW: You mentioned Dr. King earlier, and there's this story about how he first started using children in the protests, because he wanted the imagery of children being hosed down and attacked by dogs to circulate the globe, because he knew that would bring more sympathy to the movement. They had a very keen understanding of the power of images, being able to take the message even further, than if they were just people were just reading about it.

I watched your TED talk about you taking those initial photographs and the first pictures you have were pictures of people who were bloodied and who had been beaten. How did you know the impact of that? I mean, I know you turned it into your class and everything, but how did it really connect with you, the impact of those images and bringing awareness to what was going on?

[0:11:49] LS: Well, because pretty early on, even back then, you saw that the newspapers didn't report the facts. It was a protest and they'd say, oh, there were 500 people that showed up. To me, it was like 5,000 people. You had to have the documentation, the photographs to prove that not only was the crowd bigger, but that the police were beating up on people, just for expressing their first amendment rights of freedom of speech and the right to gather. Right then and there, it was really clear that imagery is a tool of propaganda and mass media and whoever controls media, they always have their own agenda. You want to be able to share the truth.

[0:12:37] LW: Talk about your transition from social justice photography to nature photography. I know you've moved to Northern California, or something like that.

[0:12:45] LS: Yeah. When I graduated, UCLA – fell in love, obviously, with filming nature. Nature was my greatest teacher, mother nature. I mean, taught me everything about color composition, lighting. At UCLA at the time, the phone department was really just getting started and really, they didn't teach you anything. They had these tenured professors who had made one movie in the anthropology department, but they didn't know how to thread a camera. They didn't know anything. Basically, I had to learn everything on my own, which was fine.

My roommate, he went to Northern California and found this piece of property. Then I went up there to help him one summer. I ended up staying for two and a half years. That was part of the back to the land movement, which I'm really learning is happening down with young people, which I didn't realize. I guess, everything goes in cycles. I went up there, we had no phone, no television, nothing. It was really interesting, because we were “the hippies.” There were no young people that were living up there at the time. Because all the young people had left those rural areas, went to San Francisco and figured out how to make money, because they'd already cut down the trees. Sheep ranching was happening, died. There was no way to make the living, but these young hippies that graduated from Berkeley and UCLA and NYU, people with PhDs were clueless. How do you use a chainsaw? How do you dig a well? How do you build a garden? How do you build a house? How do you use a hammer? We were really clueless.

The old timers, which you could fondly refer to as maybe rednecks, were really our allies. We bonded, which was really beautiful. Something people don't realize, because we were mutually enabling each other. They taught us the ropes. We were planting food and growing organic food and definitely, cannabis was starting to be grown. That was bringing income into the small town. People were buying farming equipment and groceries and spending money at the cafe. There was an economy that grew out of the fact that, and at that point, it was very innocent and really beautiful.

I mean, somebody would grow 10 or 12 plants in the middle of their garden. It wasn't like a big industrial money-making machine. It was just a way to make some extra dough and to be able to cover your costs. There were little babies running around in these little fields with marijuana plants and tomato plants and broccoli and everything. Then unfortunately, down the road, four or five years later, it got a little bit weird, because when the value of these plants became so expensive, for the first time we had sinsemilla, not Mexican weed. It attracted the opportunity for people to rip you off into steel.

Then you had this dilemma. What are you going to do? Are you going to have a gun? What if someone comes and steals your plants, which you've been growing for six or seven months? Each plant is about \$2,000. Yeah, it got a little bit strange after a while. But in the beginning, it was so beautiful. It was so innocent. It was so pure. That's what I started to film time lapse. I got these old 35-millimeter cameras, a movie camera. Even back then, to buy one 35-millimeter, which is what I wanted to do, because it's high resolution, it was about a 120 grand, \$150,000. There were only two or three manufacturers, Panavision. You could only lease a camera. You couldn't buy a camera.

Obviously, I had to buy one if I was going to be living far away from Hollywood and wanting to use it every day. I had these old cameras, were built in the thirties, which had the same quality of the movement where imagery is steady. I retrofitted them with still camera lenses. It was the guy up there, named Ron Wickersham, who built the electric guitars for the Grateful Dead. He built a battery motor that I could take these cameras outside and shoot an animation, because animation was always done indoors, like cartoons with cells, Disney type animation. They had these big motors, literally this big with an AC cord that you have to plug into a wall.

I bridged by art photography to motion picture photography and time lapses in the middle. No one had done that before. What's amazing now is, guess what? There's a time-lapse app on your iPhone. I brought that form of storytelling into the visual vocabulary.

[0:17:42] LW: You were literally the guy that innovated the time-lapse photography.

[0:17:47] LS: Well, it had been done in 16-millimeter earlier on. Primarily, in the scientific studio, where they would have a plant for the grid behind it and then be able to show, guess what? The plant moves and it gets bigger. It has never been used as a form of artistic, or even normal communication. It was only a tool for scientific measurement.

[0:18:19] LW: You went to Ron and said, "This is what I want to do." How did you know Ron could help you with this, first of all? Then secondly –

[0:18:24] LS: Well, because he was a genius. Back in the day, there were these companies called Ampex. They made tape recorders. He was an electronic genius in that regard. He was making the most amazing electric guitars for the Grateful Dead.

[0:18:41] LW: Was he one of your weed buddies, or something? How did you even know this guy?

[0:18:45] LS: Yeah. Yeah. Well, my good buddy lived up the ridge. His name was Richie Pekner, was a roadie for the Grateful Dead. He knew Ron, because who lived in Sebastopol and Ron Wickersham made guitars and electric equipment, electric guitars. Was one of these guys that could just invent anything and build anything. I told him my problem. I don't have a long enough extension cord to take me out into the woods. He helped me build a motor that ran on flashlight batteries. It's interesting, Light. 25 years later, a guy named Dan Norris built a DC-powered stop motion motor and for sale. Guess what? He got the Academy Award for technical achievement.

[0:19:33] LW: Did you guys, even Ron Patton, this contraption that he created?

[0:19:36] LS: No, because it was just a one off. Dan Norris built them for sale and made them available for other filmmakers and people to buy or rent, whatever. It got an Academy Award.

[0:19:51] LW: That's awesome.

[0:19:53] LS: Yeah, then 25 years earlier. But the beautiful thing beyond the technique is that. I was able to spend a lot of time filming beauty, things that hadn't been captured before, which really filled my sense of wonder.

[0:20:09] LW: How did you solve the film problem with the time lapse? It's going to run out of film at some point.

[0:20:13] LS: Because in time lapse, you shoot very slowly. You shoot one frame every five seconds, maybe one frame every minute, to normal filming –

[0:20:22] LW: Got it. It's like stop motion then, basically. You're just doing it every –

[0:20:28] LS: Right. Normal filming is 24 frames per second, going through the camera. It takes a long time to shoot a roll of film. A roll of film is 400 feet, which is 4 minutes. That roll of film back then cost me – it was roughly, it was a 100 bucks a minute for film development, processing and getting a print off that negative. A \$100 a minute. Today, that sounds expensive. Imagine me with no money, living off the grid in Elk and Mendocino County, that was just a lot of money. But I could afford one roll of film. It could take me a couple of months to shoot that roll of film, which was great. Because I was shooting 35-millimeter, which back then, the only people who shot 35-millimeter movie film were commercials and feature films.

16-millimeter with educational. My inspiration with the fine art photographers, like Ansel Adams and Edward Weston, who shot four by five, eight by 10 negatives, big negatives. For me, the bigger than negative, the better. To this day, I'm super grateful, because guess what? That's stuff that I shot back in 1970, I can scan it at 4K and I've used it in my current work. The series that I launched on Netflix called Moving Art, which was a major breakthrough when Netflix claimed they can stream 4K, and they showed it at the consumer electronics show about six years ago, everybody went, "Wow," and their jaws dropped, how incredible. That was stuff that was shot in 1970. Nobody knew.

For me, shooting high resolution has always been standard, because formats change all the time, delivery systems change all the time. The more resolution, the better. But getting back to Elk for a moment, it filled my sense of wonder, but the other thing, economics. I mean, if it took me a month or two to shoot a roll of film, that worked for me. I was able to shoot film. It didn't cost me a ton of money. The camera guy bought, it was like \$2,000. This old camera that was not reflex, it had to be modified.

That became, which is really amazing, Light, that was the birth of really, the stock footage industry, because The Secret Life of Plants was a film that was happening at the time and they want to use my shots and me being an artist. I'm going, I'm not going to give you my shots. I will license it to you. I'll make a copy of it for you to use. Back then, the only people who – the only companies that did that was archival newsreel companies, or outtakes from movies. That was all scratch and stuff. There was nothing, there was no contemporary high-quality imagery that you could license. Of course, now there's shutter stock and Getty and all these incredible outlets that make it available to anybody.

[0:23:36] LW: You're a young guy and you're being scrappy about all of this. What gave you the foresight to know that I should license these images, instead of just giving? Because I'm sure you needed the money, or you could have used the money at the time.

[0:23:47] LS: Well, because I always had the desire to be an independent filmmaker and to be able to tell my own story. That was primary, more than the business entrepreneur that said, "Oh, I know in the future, this is all going to be super valuable." It was a combination of both, but definitely, the artistic idea that if you create something, you own it. Pretty simple. Actually, back then, one of the things you learned when you were negotiating, my thesis film was acquired by United Artists. That was a miracle I was able to do that. They bought my movie for \$2,000 with all rights and perpetuity throughout the universe.

[0:24:28] LW: If you reincarnate, he still have to –

[0:24:31] LS: That's the agreement that they give you. It's a standard agreement. The key that you always have to worry about is who owns the negative, because that was possession. It was all about who control the negative. If you ever got into dispute, anyone back then, with producers, or investors, or people that you owe money, or they owe you money, whoever owned, or whoever held a negative had the upper hand.

This idea was always ingrained in me that holding on to the negative was paramount. I'm going to make a copy of it, make a print of it. That's how movies were released back in the day. There's always a master and then you make a copy, even in digital. That was always key was possession is 9/10th of the law. Yeah, I always believed in doing that. What had happened, what's really amazing, after I was up in Elk and lived that lifestyle, which was great for a while, but filmmaking is a team effort. I was doing everything myself, which is good. I was proud of the fact that I knew how to edit, shoot, sound, do everything.

I would write letters to United artists to see if they would want to buy my next short movie that had to be mailed. After A Secret Life of Plants, which took me to Calcutta, I had never left the country. I never could afford to travel. I went from Elk and Mendocino to LA to get my haircut, got my passport, and then went straight to Calcutta to shoot these sequences. That was right after the incredible floods they had in Bangladesh, and going to Calcutta in India back in the

70s, there's a ton of poverty. I felt like the way India is today. High-tech type of – there were beggars everywhere in the street.

I filmed the sequences I needed to film, but when I came back, I realized LA isn't quite as hectic as I thought it was after being in Calcutta. 25 million people in poverty, which is a whole different world. I came back to LA and I showed people this gorgeous footage I had. I showed the networks. I showed studios. They went, "Oh, my God. It's so beautiful. We've never seen anything like that." We don't know what to do with it, because you can't tell a story without conflict. Then my brain, I went, "That's bullshit. Are you kidding me? I mean, the story of nature is about symbiosis, about relationships, about regeneration, cooperation, harmony."

The people that got what I was doing were the ad agencies, because they realized, it was eye candy. If you can grab someone's consciousness in a second, that's the goal. Images that are beautiful, it's an emotional reaction. You can either trigger people with fear, or you trigger them with beauty. They started to license my work. I was in LA. I was doing visual effects. I worked on Smooth Criminal with Michael Jackson. I did music videos as a DP cameraman director. What took off was my licensing business, because when digital occurred and there was a digital backlot, long story short, basically, in 1996, I had a hundred employees, 12 foreign offices and Getty Images bought my company. We were the cornerstone of the first motion library to be acquired by Getty Images, which became a multi-billion-dollar industry.

[0:28:19] LW: You wish you'd ask for more money back when you sold it to them.

[0:28:22] LS: Well, the problem, Light, was I never knew that selling your company is a goal. I was clueless about all that. I just thought, you build a company, you reinvest into your company. you pay all your employees, you grow, you do what you want to do. The digital revolution meant that this was the last piece of IP that you could purchase that had value. The Japanese bought all the record companies. Then they bought the studios. Then guys like Marguerite, Bill Gates realized the last piece of IP that was available were these stock still and stock motion libraries. That became the last acquisition that you could acquire.

[0:29:11] LW: When you first looked at these time lapse images, what did you see that you did – it would shock you that you had no idea about. Did you already know about the Secret Life of

Plants. Not the book that turned into the documentary, but just how interconnected everything was in nature.

[0:29:29] LS: That's a great question. I mean, I feel that. Well, first of all, when I saw the results, I definitely was shocked and not shocked. I was filled with wonder, because to be honest, I thought I was looking into the face of God to be able to see the perspective from a flower's point of view. Oh, my God. That's something you can't imagine. You can't see. You can tell people that, "oh, plants are living in a different metabolic rate. They're sentient." But you can't prove it. If you can show it to people, they're like, wow, there it is. Guess what? Not only are they opening and closing to the light. They dance. They have grace. They have beauty.

Then you ask the question, well, why are they beautiful when nobody can see that? Other flowers can see it, I guess, and certainly, pollinators can see it, which is how we get our healthy food. Number one, that's the thing that turned me on initially. What was the second part of your question?

[0:30:29] LW: Did you know about the Secret Life of Plants? Did you know about that whole world, the inner world of nature, the flora and the fauna talking to each other?

[0:30:37] LS: Actually, I didn't. The book was out there. I had never read the book, but then I got involved in working on that movie, which, by the way, Stevie Wonder did the score for.

[0:30:47] LW: Nice.

[0:30:48] LS: I actually spoke to him about six months ago for the very first time in my life. I was sitting, I was having this meeting in Santa Barbara. One of the people there used to be his manager. I told him, "Oh, I worked on the Secret Life of Plants." I found out that he was Stevie's manager. He goes, "Hey, hold on." He whips out his cellphone and goes ding, ding, ding, ding. He goes, "Hey, Don. I got the guy here that shot the flowers and Secret Life of Plants," and he throws me the phone. There I am talking to Stevie Wonder, which was really a surprise.

I did not know that stuff. The plants communicate to each other. What's interesting is that everybody made fun of it. Yeah, plants don't talk to each other. Of course, with Fantastic Fungi, we had scientific evidence that mother treat, takes care of its babies and plants do talk to each

other, that they share nutrients, they share information, that a forest is a community, where ecosystems flourish without greed. Yeah, all that stuff took me a while to learn. I'm not someone who reads a lot. I'm someone that observes a lot visually. I don't do a lot of scientific research reading, because, I don't know, I just love learning it from real experience.

[0:32:13] LW: Even before Fantastic Fungi, you had been collecting these clips of people talking about gratitude. You kept bringing up this subject of gratitude. Why gratitude, when you were doing this time-lapse stuff with nature? How did that tie in, to you?

[0:32:29] LS: Well, it ties in, because earlier we talked about the fact with my parents and that background being grateful for the little things in life. Then you think about the fact that when I went and lived in Northern California, we had to be frugal. We had to be resourceful. All the little things mattered. If someone had a barn that was falling apart, then you could get that wood and recycle it. If you found ways to go to a neighbor and harvest some of the apples from an orchard that had too many apples for them to eat. I mean, we were being resourceful, sharing firewood, sharing food. That's how you survived. It was actually beautiful.

It wasn't like, we were struggling, or we were – I think about it, Light, when you go to an expensive resort nowadays, like this out there, like Big Sur, or in Sonoma, and you're spending \$2,000 a night, the stay-in is beautiful wooded area and you're eating organic food and doing yoga, probably with you. That's a high-class experience. I was living that.

[0:33:43] LW: It was Tuesday for you.

[0:33:45] LS: Yeah. My rent was a \$150 a month. I would walk down to the creek every day and out to the ocean. All the food was organic, because we were sharing food with all my neighbors and all my friends. I lived on the coast. It's foggy. I grew lettuce. They were up to ridge three miles. It's hot and sunny. They were growing broccoli and vegetables. We would get together for potluck. I mean, we were living a high-class lifestyle with very little money. Now it kills me when I go to these – we're both, I'm sure, invited to go to these conferences that are at these resorts, right? They're giving me a small plate of food with salad and stercium and all that stuff. I'm going, "Shit, that's what I eat all the time." It didn't cost me a ton of money to do it.

I just wanted to say, that what happened, things happen in cycles. But back in the 70s, people made a lot of fun at the hippies looking back. We were right about everything with the hindsight. We were right about the fact that the Vietnam War was immoral, unethical and a giant tragedy. We were right about the fact that pesticides were killing us. We were right about the fact that racial inequality. We're right about gender issues. We were right about psychedelics being a useful tool. We were right about everything.

That was Earth Day in 1970. Here it is 53 years later, Earth Day's tomorrow. It's like, we were right about all that stuff. We haven't really figured it out. There's been some progress, but consciousness and behavior hasn't really shifted. We need, I think, a more positive story. I think, the messaging of saying that we're doomed and that we're facing a mass extinction makes people feel like they can't do anything about it.

Being positive about being grateful for the little guys, for the bees, the hummingbirds, the fungi, for the healthy food we need to eat, that I believe is the way you would still hope and courage. You need gratitude to fight the good fight. Because what studies approve and the people that practice gratitude are more resilient. Then the same thing happens in nature. I observe plants in a resilient. I look at a blade of grass and grows in a crack in the sidewalk. I'm like, I'll honor it, man. I go, that is really – Not only is it resilient, that's a tough critter. They can have that energy. Gratitude creates resilience. Resilience makes you appreciate and protect what you love.

[0:36:41] LW: You've been on gratitude for a while. I don't know if you would characterize Fantastic Fungi as being your – one of your biggest breakout successes, where people around the globe literally talked about it and spread the word and that's how I originally found out about it as well. What do you attribute that to, that success of Fantastic Fungi? What surprised you about that?

[0:37:04] LS: Yeah, well, a couple of things. I think the timing was perfect. I started that film 15 years before it got released in late 2019. The psychedelic renaissance was just beginning to happen and people were finally comfortable to talk about psychedelics and research was starting to kick in again.

I tell you what the main reason is, I think, or in conjunction with that is that I self-distributed the movie. A lot of times, I'm sure you hear a lot of stories from filmmakers how the studios didn't do

what they promised to do. Wings, I did a film called Wings of Life, which is about pollinators with Meryl Streep as a voice of the flower, seducing bees, bats, hummingbirds, and butterflies. Extraordinarily beautiful. Great score. Gorgeous movie.

But politics and executive shuffle get in the way, and promises made about how the film would be distributed go and happen. The timing on that really was unfortunate, because did studio chief to cook at the time who greenlit the movie got – and was there for 20 years got fired a month before the release of my movie. Then the new guy comes to town, the new sheriff, of course, he wants to downplay the previous agenda of his predecessor. Disney Nature was created a year, or two earlier. He killed the label. It was a first time Disney have a label called Disney Nature. Then I'm asking myself like, shit, it isn't about the money. It's like, come on universe. What the hell is happening here?

I make a film about colony collapse disorder, that the bees are disappearing. If we lose the bees, we lose our food supply, because they pollinate flowers, flowers creates berries, seeds, nuts, vegetables, fruits. There's been just a lot of situations like that, where the timing was unfortunate, because the agenda had a giant corporation shifts. It isn't like they're evil. It's just not their priority. They're marketing Marvel. They're marketing Star Wars. They're marketing mega blockbusters. Then you got this little tiny film about flowers and bees and bats and the – it's like, they don't think they're doing the right thing for a shareholder value. That's the word that I get.

Even though they go, "We love you and we think your film is really important, but I got to worry about the shareholders." Which is really a cop out when you think about it, right, Light? It's like, come on. But people that are in those positions tend to be corporate-minded and they're protecting their butt and their position. You don't do things for the greater good. You do things for the quarterly returns, which is based on what your income will be based on and how you're going to be judged. Short-term thinking, which is really the curse of capitalism in our current society. Nobody thinks long-term. It's all short-term profit.

Anyways, that's maybe a long way to answer your question, but that's the reality. What I did was for the very first time, having gone through all that, and I said, no more heartache for me. I actually went to a cardiologist, just to confirm that the pain in my heart was psychosomatic, which was a gift. Because I didn't want to think that it was physiological, like there was

something wrong with me. You know what I mean? If it was psychosomatic, I figured I could adjust my mind to overcome that.

I decided with Fantastic Fungi, it's a movement. I'm going to just grab it and go for it. We self-distributed. I was able to open up in one theater in Denver, where they just decriminalized psilocybin. We proved the fact that we could fill a theater. We proved the fact that it could run for 12 weeks.

[0:41:19] LW: How did you do that, though? I did you get butts and seats in Denver?

[0:41:21] LS: We got butts and seats without money, by reaching out to the Psychedelic Society in Denver. They had just passed that initiative. As a matter of fact, the psychedelic decriminalization initiative got more votes than the mayor did in that election. There was a community there that was really into it. After that, it was just really word of mouth. Because once you fill a theater, three, four, five nights in a row, and it's a good product and it blows people away, word of mouth will carry you.

[0:41:54] LW: I've used PR people before and I think that's bullshit. PR people are bullshit. You really have to get involved as the creator. Did you employ any unique tactics, or anything like that as the creator of this work that helped to reach the top guy in that society and send him a video with the password and then already in this stuff?

[0:42:15] LS: Well, more than that, Light, I showed up. I was there every night doing Q&A and I brought in local leaders talking about recycling, and talking about foraging for fungi, talking about psychedelics.

[0:42:30] LW: Did you bring Paul in?

[0:42:32] LS: Well, Paul did not come to Denver, but he came to other cities, we did. Yeah, in Washington state. I did it. I think it was better to bring in the local leaders, because when I would leave, they would have the connection to whoever that group was that was either heading psychedelics, or forging, recycling, organic farming. I was knitting a community together. People that are into spirituality, yoga, healthy food, scientists, bringing all these people together that

had overlapping interests. They were all loving on each other, which was great. That was the key.

Then once you prove you got, as you said, you could put butts and seats in Denver. Then it's easy to go to Portland and go, we can do the same thing in Portland. Then we go to Vancouver, and then we go to Santa Cruz. We just keep on rolling. Exhibitors are basically, real estate people. They're renting you a box and they want to know you can pay the rent.

[0:43:36] LW: Were you following a playbook, or were you creating the playbook for your genre?

[0:43:42] LS: We were basically creating the playbook. I mean, indie films have done that before. Very few. People warned me, it was going to be a ton of work. A lot of hard work. I mean, I had to show up and do that stuff. I had someone like Kurt [inaudible 0:43:57] help me with booking the theaters and I did have someone helping with social media, which is we're able to use right now, which is great. I did have a team that could help me get the word out. Like you said, the PR stuff is BS. You've got to do the work.

Every time I go to another city, I kept on thinking, "Who do I know?" I mean, hey, I know this person from earthday.org. Or I know that person from some other organization. I would say, "Come on. I need you. Show up." I worked it. During COVID, when it was hard to move around, it's actually a miracle that I can do all of that from my laptop, in my dining room, that I could pull all these strings and move all these levers and distribute my movie that way. It was really remarkable, because after we did the theatrical, which we were successful, up until March of 2020, then we had to pivot into doing it virtually, because of COVID.

I couldn't tell people, go to a movie theater. It was really confusing. If you can recall back then, because some states were doing it, some states were not doing it. The last thing ever I wanted to have the karma was to say, "Oh, go see my movie," and somebody dies. I mean, in Montana, or someplace where it's wide open, they can go do it. We actually invented virtual cinema. What we did, this is really cool, we told the theaters where the film was booked. Show it, they have a big email list. Tell your community that they can watch it online. Then we still split 50-50 on the revenue with the theaters. The theaters that I went to are art house theaters. They are community-based theaters.

Then I would like to have a Google alert for Fantastic Fungi. I go, "Oh, wow." There was a theater in Ohio that had a food bank giveaway with the revenue that was generated from Fantastic Fungi. I love this feeling I had where I helped, but didn't help. Indirectly, I helped generate revenue in a place like in Columbus, or someplace where that generated revenue in a local community theater that's struggling at the time of COVID and they were feeding people. For me, that was news. I was just reading, that I was somehow indirectly a catalyst for that. That's beautiful.

That to me is the example of the pollinators. I think when the bee lands on that flower and it's just trying to get pollen to feed its babies back in the hive, it doesn't know that it's a messenger for reproduction for the flower. I don't think the bee is conscious of that. I think it's just doing what it has to do for it to survive and reproduce and keep its community growing, right? Indirectly, when it goes from flower to flower, it's moving DNA around. The pollinators weren't doing that, the flowers wouldn't be able to reproduce, because they don't have legs.

They got this messenger service called a pollinator to help them reproduce, which is so beautiful. I love it when goodness happens unknowingly. It's not a quid pro quo. It isn't like, Light, I'll do this for you and you do this for me. It's more like, I'm going to just give you a gift and do something positive for you. Then miraculously, somehow it circles back to me without me being aware of negotiating for it.

[0:47:38] LW: Are you one of the fortunate people who naturally, you have a baseline of level of optimism? Or do you grapple with any anxiety, or imposter syndrome, or mental health stuff that you have to fight against in the background while you're out here trying to pitch your movie and get people to get excited about it?

[0:47:57] LS: I do. I think with the fact that my parents were Holocaust survivors, I definitely find it easy to feel like a victim. Especially when something is really unjust, whether you get turned down from a pitch, or if someone really did something that was grossly unfair, again, like promises made where they distribute your movie and they don't distribute your movie, it's easy to feel hurt. What I found is that with gratitude, I can stop that feeling. I can put it on pause when I ask myself, what can I be grateful for?

The fact that I'm breathing. The fact that I can move my fingers. I also reflect on what my parents went through, which is a lot tougher than what I'm going through at the moment. Shit, I got rejected. Get over it. I learned that late in life, because it's easy to get riled up when you know that something is really unjust, socially unjust, especially. To have that anger and victimhood inside of you, you realize, you're only hurting yourself.

I remember I was in India. I was filming. I was in this funky classroom. It was this chalkboard. I saw this thing on the chalkboard. It said, people who did annoy you, control you. Same idea. Now if you're with the news and these crazy guys that are politicians right now, I have to be vigilant that that's going on, because there's anti-semitism, there's racism. It's really easy to get sucked in and watching that stuff all day long. If you do that, you're living in their world. That's the name of the game we have right now, Light. It's a battle of consciousness. I can grab your consciousness with fear, which is easier than grabbing your consciousness with love and beauty, because the primal thing is fear. It's the easiest thing to do. If I point a gun at you right now, I know I'll get your attention immediately. I'll get an adrenaline reaction from you immediately. Takes a lot more effort to make you laugh and cry with art, with storytelling, with beauty.

Those are emotions that can combat fear. We're living in a really tough time right now, where fear is used by politicians. I'm going to say it, by Fox News, to keep people locked in fear. That's why we had a lot of shootings this week of innocent people knocking on the door, going up a driveway. People are watching Fox News all day long, being filled with fear. Thinking that whoever's going to knock on your door, come up your driveway is out to get them. People are really being brainwashed and programmed to be loaded with fear.

We have to be vigilant. I also think, what I'm trying to do is combat that because you can't just talk about it. It's what I'm trying to do with The Louie Channel, having a platform where you can go and watch movies and media that's positive. What world do you want to live in? Look at Gandhi, be the world, be the change you want to be. If you don't like this culture, throw a better party. It's the only way to fight that. You can't get these people, these politicians, or governments, or corporate institutions to change, because you're going to give them some argument about morality, or what is ethical. I don't think it works that way. It hasn't worked that way.

They don't really have a conscience, because it boils down to greed and money and I don't even want to go there. What you can do is create an alternate world that doesn't need those resources. Feed your own community with respect, love, kindness, generosity. What we're doing right now, we're skirting the big broadcasters. We're having a conversation digitally across the country to shift consciousness with people. We're doing it. You're doing it. That's the only way, I think, to combat that. We can grab people's attention and attention equals consciousness, then we're shifting behavior.

[0:52:18] LW: I have a couple more questions about Fantastic Fungi. You had a relationship with Netflix before that, I think I remember reading. What were the metrics that they need to see in order to transition out of the theaters and on to streaming? For the documentary filmmaker out there listening to this.

[0:52:35] LS: What happened is I distributed the film theatrically first. Then after that, I made it available virtually, digitally on my own Fantastic Fungi platform. After that, I went to Apple and Amazon where it got distributed on those platforms. Last thing I did, that was VOD, video on demand. Last thing I did is I went to Netflix. Netflix, I licensed it. I didn't sell it. I had offered from them early on to buy the movie. As we talked about earlier, I'm not into selling my negative. The price was pretty low. I made a commitment that I wasn't going to go down that path anymore, where I was going to be potentially disappointed.

Besides the film being good and let's say, being successful, the goal is to create a movement. The goal was we built a community. We definitely did build a movement with Fantastic Fungi. I've had so many people, let's say, start top-down, business owners go, "Thanks to your movie, we became successful." People that are selling mushrooms and not psychedelic mushrooms. I'm talking about healthy mushrooms and lions mane, turkey tail, all the things that are good for your body and good for your mind.

Then a lot of people just saying, "For the first time, I can have a conversation with my friends, my family, my parents about psychedelics. They were able to understand." Because, again, the fear factor that got shoved on people, that these are drugs like heroin that were going to ruin your life and destroy your chromosomes. There's a lot of bias and fear that needed to be overcome. The fact that people could express, which for them might have been the deepest spiritual experience they'd ever had in their life and they couldn't talk about it for fear of being

ostracized, or going to jail, that is the equivalent of religious persecution. You have to hide. Can't talk about it. How different is that than people practicing religion in caves?

It was good for people to be able to get it off their chest. You know what I mean? To be open, to have the conversation. That's what the film did. It created a conversation. Whether I was there physically to facilitate the conversation, or if we did it virtually and I was able to zoom in and trigger it, or people on their own just had the conversation, because I would run into strangers and I hear it almost every other day, when people telling me stories, how they have a 16-year-old kid who was screwing up with drugs and alcohol and having taken a mushroom trip. It changed their life, changed his life, or her life. Remarkable stories.

People who were involved with addiction, people who were suicidal. As a matter of fact, yeah, we just finished a clinical trial here in Santa Monica, combining psilocybin with my imagery to treat alcohol addiction. The results are super positive. The combination is better than even the psilocybin by itself. You're watching nature's imagery, rhythms and patterns that makes you feel connected to a grand universe to get you out of your ego, in conjunction with the medicine that is nature's medicine as well. Plant medicine, fungal medicine is, it's remarkable. We're just beginning to, I think, really explore that.

[0:56:21] LW: It's like a modern version of the Secret Life of Plants. I mean, is your take on that, essentially.

[0:56:28] LS: There was no mention of psychedelics in the Secret Life of Plants. It was more that they were conscious and sentient, was the big breakthrough.

[0:56:39] LW: I think that's a foundational understanding of Fantastic Fungi. Yes, there's these effects you can have, but still, these things are all talking to each other and they're taking care of each other. There's a whole society of plants that we don't even realize when you're walking past the plant. I mean, I think about that a lot. Having watched your film, everything is sentient. It's all sentient. It's all talking to each other. It's fantastic.

[0:57:04] LS: Think about this. If they are talking to each other, which they do primarily through chemistry, right? Moving nutrients and signaling each other, maybe with bioelectrical impulse. How are they going to talk to you? They don't have language like we do. The majority of life on

this planet speaks to each other chemically, right? Molecules, aroma, chemistry. If they are going to talk to you, the only way they can speak to you is if you ingest them. Those molecules unlock a receptor in your brain, which gives you a taste of the divine. You lose your ego to be able to experience how everything is connected.

Perhaps, they're trying to tell us that we need to live in harmony with nature, and to get our act together, and maybe stop destroying species in their own self-interest.

[0:58:11] LW: In the background, you've been accumulating this footage, like you said, for 15 years. With Gratitude Revealed, it's the same thing. You have this footage, you've been collecting, you've been a prolific TED speaker speaking about gratitude and your work in nature. How did you decide to do fungi First and then Gratitude? Was that a happy accident?

[0:58:36] LS: Well, you look back and you can look at where that chronology and those connections are. Before Fantastic Fungi, I mentioned I did Wings of Life. What I'm really trying to do is really unveil the mystery. What is the foundation of life? Wings of Life is really about the intersection between the animal world and the plant world. Pollination. They're getting it on with each other, but they're not having sex, because how can one kingdom make love to another kingdom? They're not even the same species. But they're enabling each other to prosper and reproduce and grow, which is really remarkable.

We are the beneficiaries of that. We get the fruits and the nuts and the seeds and the vegetables. I thought, wow, that's the foundation of life. Then, wait a minute. What do plants need? They need soil. Where does soil come from? I'll tell you, 90% of people have no idea where soil comes from. Soil comes from fungi breaking down organic matter, rocks and minerals to make soil. It was important for me to then take it to the next level up and next level down. Again, what is the foundation of life?

I make Fantastic Fungi, which is a journey underground into nature's intelligence, to look at these systems of mycelium and ecosystem where trees communicate to each other. Ecosystems flourish, again, without greed. It's really nature's operating instructions. It's a beautiful blueprint for how we should live our lives as well as shared economy. Then once you learn all of that, what are you going to do about it? How are you going to integrate that into your life? Into your relationship with your friends, your family, your workers, your community, the

world? As I look back now, gratitude revealed as a journey into the soul to take that wisdom and figure out how to integrate that. To be able to take these values, like generosity and kindness, connection, forgiveness, creativity, courage, love. All these values add up to gratitude, in my opinion. I'm not a positive psychologist, which is my point of view.

Actually, as I look at a lot of self-help books, and I just scanned the table of contents, all those values are in every self-help book I've ever seen. Self-help books happen to be the number one best-sellers in the non-fiction category. I think it is a natural evolution. Like I said earlier, growing up with my parents who are frugal, they don't have much money, but appreciating all the little things, it's also the basis for being an environmentalist. It's being frugal. It's not like, you turn off the lights, not because it's going to cost you money. You're turning off the light, because there's a coal plant on Navajo land that's burning coal and polluting the atmosphere. That's why I turn off the light switch. It's pennies, which I could afford now, but you want to be conscious about the impact you're having. It's all the same.

[1:01:51] LW: From a storytelling perspective, how did you tackle that component in the gratitude reveal narrative? Because as you know, when we're used to seeing certain stories presented in certain ways, there's got to be an antagonist.

[1:02:03] LS: I'm not sure there has to be one, but there normally is one.

[1:02:06] LW: There normally is one, yeah.

[1:02:07] LS: There normally is one. That was the first time I put myself in the film. I mean, this is my journey, my point of view. I'm not, like I said, the authority on gratitude, which I think you can only speak from your own experience. These are the people I bumped into. The beautiful part is I get to share it with you. I mean, some of the people I bumped into are no longer here. The fact that you can hang out with these people and get their spirit and their wisdom. These are magic moments, by the way. This is like, everybody I've bumped into aren't really great. People are magical, or extraordinary. I mean, these are ordinary, extraordinary people that I share in my movie. The fact that I'm giving you the tip of the iceberg, the creme de la creme by curating these magic moments and stringing them together like pearls on a string, that's a gift.

[1:03:05] LW: You have everyone from Deepak to Norman Lear, to Alex Gray, to Jason Silva. Do you just carry your camera around with you and you go to some conferences and two of these guys, Paula Hawkins is at the conference and say, “Hey, let me go in your hotel room and shoot some – ask you questions about gratitude,” because you said you've been accumulating this footage over the years. How does that work?

[1:03:26] LS: The answer is no, I don't do that that way, because I want high-quality recording, but also, good lighting. Usually, it's a tiny crew. I'm really aware. Everybody, “Oh, I like the film. It's really beautiful.” Well, that's part of the story. I'm seducing you to fall in love with what you're looking at outside of the words that are being spoken. When gratitude revealed pretty much wall to wall words, but it's beautiful. It means beautiful music and beautiful imagery. All these people are beautiful people, but it's important that visually it's beautiful, because beauty is I always say it, beauty is nature's tool for survival, because you protect what you love. If I can make you fall in love with what you're watching, then it's going to go deeper inside your soul.

[1:04:23] LW: You also mentioned that you have this time lapse has been going for 40 years. Were you being literal about that?

[1:04:29] LS: Yes. I have cameras going non-stop for four decades, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, because I'm shooting time lapse, which means I'm shooting on average, 5 seconds of footage per 24 hours, focusing on flowers and plants and mushrooms. It takes a lot of time, which is something money can't buy to film in plant life, fungi and time lapse. Imagine, Light, if I've been shooting for four decades, 24 hours a day, seven days a week, as I said, I get roughly two to five seconds per day. How much time lapse footage do you think I have?

[1:05:15] LW: Lots.

[1:05:17] LS: Make a wild guess in terms of a geek clue, it's in hours, okay. How many hours do I have?

[1:05:25] LW: Let's see. 40 hours, 24 hours a day for 40 years. 5,000 hours? No. 20,000 hours.

[1:05:34] LS: 20 hours.

[1:05:35] LW: How many?

[1:05:36] LS: 20.

[1:05:37] LW: 20 hours.

[1:05:38] LS: Yes.

[1:05:38] LW: Oh, wow.

[1:05:39] LS: I've squeezed 40 years into 20 hours. Does that blow your mind?

[1:05:47] LW: It did. Is there a certain limit to it? Or are you just going to keep going indefinitely?

[1:05:54] LS: I'm going to keep going. It's like, one of those things, like most consecutive games played in sports. It's not like a giant record, but it's got a cool record. I realized only recently, it is a practice. Because actually, I read in a book on blue zones. You've heard about that where people live the longest.

[1:06:12] LW: Of course.

[1:06:15] LS: What is common to the blue zones, when people wake up in the morning, first thing they do is they go in the garden. They check out what opened, but closed. That's what I do. I look at my flowers every morning before I even have tea or water. I'm observing, did a flower open? Is it in frames? Is it in focus? Do I have to set up another shot? Because it takes so long to capture what I'm doing, I don't have a lot of dead time in between. I can't say, "Oh, it failed last night, or it opened, or it's over. Then tonight I'm going to set up another shot." I immediately set up another shot. I can't waste a single second.

It's a juggling act. I got to keep the ball in the air the whole time. I realized in a way, it's like a practice, because I don't really have a traditional meditative practice where I do a certain physical thing every morning. This is my practice. You got to keep the cameras rolling. I got to keep the lighting going. I got to keep the plant happy. I got to keep the subject good. I got to

make sure there's enough memory. I got to keep on doing what I need to do in functional consciousness to maintain the fact that I'm recording something, even if I fail. There is a lot of failure in front of the camera. Because of that and because it takes a lot of time, I need to keep the ball in the air. I can't drop the ball.

[1:07:48] LW: You said that you love making the invisible visible. How does that relate to gratitude? How do we make the invisible visible through the lens of gratitude?

[1:07:57] LS: I think, bringing forth what you're grateful for is a way to become present. A lot of times, it is invisible. We don't think about all the good things that happened during the day. It's only natural that we're always putting out that fire and dealing with that emergency, or the problem that needs to get fixed, because we're hardwired to do that. That's what we do. Fix things. I think, being able to pull out the things that you can be grateful for is one way of making the invisible visible.

We don't nurture the good stuff that happens and good news. My daughter did something really great. I go, "Hey," I smile, but then it's like, five seconds later, I'm back to problem solving. We need to, I think, draw that from inside of us and make those invisible emotions visible.

[1:08:57] LW: Did your parents get to witness any of your success as a filmmaker?

[1:09:00] LS: They did toward the end. I think my dad was pretty proud. My mom died in the mid-90s and my dad lived 10 years longer. Yeah, he was really definitely proud. I don't think they quite understood what I was doing. They were blue collar workers. They were always, first question, they go like, "Are you making a living?" They don't know what it's like to be a "entrepreneur," an independent filmmaker. I would say yes, and they were satisfied. That's all they needed to know.

[1:09:33] LW: Because it seems like, a lot of your work is almost a tribute to their struggle, the things that they went through and helping other people experience the silver lining of those experiences, but without having to go through all them, the trauma related to those experiences, or equipping us with the tools to navigate challenge and trauma in our life and having something to reflect back on and saying, essentially, that if you just walk outside and walk through a park, or walk through your backyard. There's beauty everywhere, if you're paying attention to it.

When you're creating this, or thinking about creating it, who are you thinking about watching this, or witnessing it and being transformed?

[1:10:13] LS: Well, I think, primarily myself, because if it's going to turn me on, I'm assuming it's going to turn you on. There's really some logic there, because I don't create the beauty. I'm a messenger in terms of recording the beauty. Then the fact that it's beautiful to me and it's beautiful to you means that we're both responding to the rhythms and patterns of nature that touch our soul. I mean, they've done studies about symmetry and all the different things that we agree is beautiful. None of us went to beauty school. None of us were taught aesthetics of appreciation. If it turns me on, again, it doesn't have to be a beautiful vista, or a flower? It could be a crack in the sidewalk. It could be a fire hydrant. It could be graffiti on the wall, right? Whatever grabs my attention and touches me, in truth, it seems to also touch other people. Maybe not everybody, but a lot of people. I think that's true in almost every art form. You're able to tap into a universal consciousness that turns us on. We all want to get turned on.

[1:11:32] LW: We have Disney Plus, we have Paramount Plus. Now we have The Louie Channel. How does that work? Where do people find The Louie Channel? What is The Louie Channel? What kind of content? Is it all your content? Is it other people's content? How does it work?

[1:11:46] LS: It's a combination. It's primarily at this point, my content, but I have Friends of Louie, where I put up stuff like Howard Hall's, my buddy's, one of the best underwater cinematographers. I'm going to curate the best of the best and create an opportunity for a lot of these films to find your audience. I mean, you mentioned Paramount Plus and all these others. Look, there's some good content on there. There's also a lot of negative content. Most storytelling in Hollywood, as I said earlier, it's based on conflict, based on fear in order to grab your attention. You're not going to find any horror films.

You're not going to find any action dramas. You're not going to find people killing each other. You're not going to find people using guns as a solution to solve a problem, because I do feel, and we're going to see the truth of this in the near future, where they're going to find out that the people that have been watching that content not only does it affect your mind and your

perceptions and your worldview, it creates cortisol in your body. It creates disease. It shortens your life.

Look how long it took to discover that smoking tobacco was killing hundreds and thousands of people with lung cancer. How long did it take for us to discover fast food is creating a diabetes epidemic and killing our children? How long is it going to take for people to realize that watching thousands of murders before you're 20-years-old is going to warp your worldview. It's toxic. I can't control the world of media, but what I can do is open up a different place for them to go, where you can watch positive imagery, not Pollyanna stuff. I'm talking about stuff that just celebrates life, that makes every cell in your body wake up and go, "Yeah, I get it. I'm with you. I want to move forward. I want to be alive." How can we not want to be alive? How can we not want to be healthy? How can we not want to be mindful, kind to each other and learn and be turned on? We definitely want to get turned on.

Nature has invented beautiful mechanisms to turn you on. When I say turn you on, I hope your audience understands. I'm not talking about drugs. I'm talking about making you feel alive, whether it's through music, or visuals, or massage, or aromatherapy, or surfing a big wave. Whatever it is that excites you, that puts you in the moment, makes you present, that is what we all want to feel. It's easy, again, to fall into that thing of fear, because we're hardwired to do it, unfortunately, but we have the power to choose what we eat, who we hang out with, what we're going to watch, what we're going to listen to, right? We have the power to choose. That's the greatest power on the planet, baby.

[1:15:07] LW: I once heard Oprah say in an interview that, and this was a recent interview, she said that she felt like she wasn't doing enough. She felt like, there was so much more she could do. I was just curious that as an accomplished documentary filmmaker yourself, what's your relationship with that like? How are you defining success these days?

[1:15:27] LS: It's a great question. I think that trying to do as much as I can, The Louie Channel, I mean, I think it's the first OTT channel. That means over the top streaming platform. It isn't like a phone app. You get it on your phone. The fact that I'm on Apple TV, Roku, all these devices where you can stream 4K imagery. Last night, we had a launch party. We had over 5,000 people. It was great. I don't know of any other individual that's ever done that before, which is pretty cool.

I'm doing the best I can. In the interviews that I had, I had a bunch of young women. They were great. Gitanjali and Shia, Bastida. These are young women. I asked them the questions about the environment. How do you get your generation to overcome the despair, that it only would be logical when you're hearing that by the time they're 50, they're going to be toast. A lot of them said the same thing that I'm communicating. They want people to celebrate life. They want people to appreciate what we do have. You can't solve all of it. But what they're doing is they're solving small parts of it. Gitanjali created this device that can measure lead in drinking water, because of what was going on in Flint, Michigan. She tackled the idea of identification of lead in the water. She did not try to tackle, how do you get rid of the lead in the water? How do you educate the people in the community and what to do in the politics? She only worked on one part of it, which was to identify the lead in the water.

She made a point and I thought I really – really, it touched me. Let's just handle those little small pieces. Instead of Oprah saying, that can do a lot more, you can't shoulder the entire world's burdens. You need to tackle what you can do. You teach a class of children how to do regenerative agriculture. Giant thing you could do. It's not going to change the entire world. But guess what? All of those things do add up. I plant a pollinated-friendly garden. Can I grow a tomato plant on my back porch, which gives me food and also, gives the bee something to eat? These are all little tiny things we can do that add up to a giant movement. That's what I think we're trying to do. The environmental movement, or I'm trying to create a movement around gratitude. Because if you're grateful for the little things in life, you naturally are going to become an eco-warrior. You're going to become a Jedi Knight. You're going to fight the good fight.

In order to fight the good fight, you got to be strong and peaceful inside. You have to have courage. You have to be resilient. You got to be strong. You got to get in shape. You can't go out there and fight a fight and be weak. I think, the stuff that you do, Light, with teaching people about yoga and everything, it's like, you got to heal yourself inside before you can heal the rest of the world.

[1:18:43] LW: I think that's a great place to end it. Just wanted to acknowledge you, Louie, for having the courage to continue to put stuff out there and do it on your own and self-distribute and all the things that come with that, which I'm sure there's some risk involved. You have to face that and just trust that, hey, it appeals to you. If it lights you up inside, then somebody else

out there is going to be interested and excited about this. I think that a lot of us could have a lot more of that in our lives.

Instead of always worrying about what everybody else thinks and what conventional wisdom has to say, you have to put yourself out there. You have to take a leap of faith. You have to trust in something greater than yourself. You are the walking, talking, living, breathing embodiment of that. Just like the plants that you film, there's an inherent trust in the ecosystem of life. Thank you so much for modeling that for all of us.

[1:19:40] LS: I appreciate that. I think trust and patience go hand-in-hand in that respect. I love the fact that what we're doing is we're able to build community. You've got a community that you're talking to right now. I'm building a community. Perhaps, there's more of us than we think. Then, if we can just cross-pollinate all these communities, which is what I'm doing with The Louie Channel, I mean, last night we had earthday.org was our major partner, but we've had spirituality and health. We have yoga groups. O Magazine. All these different people, we're bringing the – we need to coalesce.

The right knows how to get people to march in lockstep. People that are more progressive. We all have our own ideas and we're not as “organized” perhaps, but we all have the same values. Then I think that it's great to recognize that we could be the movement that changes the world.

[1:20:41] LW: Thank you, man. Looking forward to meeting you in person at some point.

[1:20:44] LS: All right. Same here.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[1:20:46] LW: Thank you so much for listening to my interview with Louie Schwartzberg. His new streaming platform, The Louie Channel, is now accessible at louiechannel.tv. There, you can stream the film *Gratitude Revealed*, which I've seen and I love and I highly recommend, as well as you can download a study guide and an entire educational curriculum related to the film. If you are a facilitator of any type, if you're a teacher, it's encouraged that you watch this film virtually in community, so that you guys can learn together about the power of gratitude.

For more inspiration, you also want to make sure to follow Louie on the socials. He's @LouieSchwartzberg. That's L-O-U-I-E-S-C-H-W-A-R-T-Z-B-E-R-G. You can also follow the handle @FantasticFungi. Of course, I'll drop links to everything that we talked about in the show notes on my website, which is lightwatkins.com/show. If this is your first time listening to The Light Watkins Show, we've got an incredible archive of past interviews with other luminaries who share how they found their path and their purpose, such as the internet poet sensation, Jung Pueblo, filmmaker Ava DuVernay, motivational speaker Ed Mylett, author Steven Pressfield, and many, many more.

You can also search interviews by subject matter if you just want to hear episodes about people who've taken leaps of faith, or creators, or people who've overcome financial struggles, or health challenges. You can get a list of all of those specific categories at lightwatkins.com/show. You can also watch these interviews on my YouTube channel if you want to put a face to a story. Just search Light Watkins Podcast on YouTube and you'll see the whole playlist. If you don't already know, I put the raw, unedited version of every podcast audio in my Happiness Insiders online community. If you like to hear all the mistakes and the false starts and the chit chat in the beginning and the end of each episode, you can listen to all of that by joining thehappinessinsiders.com, and you'll also get access to my 108-day meditation challenge, which famously has an 80% completion rate, which means 8 out of 10 people who start that challenge complete the challenge, all 108 days. It is probably the best way to get a meditation practice up and running.

Then finally, to help me bring you the best guests possible, it would go a long way if you could take 10 seconds to rate the podcast. All you do is you look at your screen, you click on the name of the podcast, you scroll down past the seven previous episodes, you'll see five blank stars. If you find these conversations inspirational, go ahead and click the star all the way on the right and you've left a five-star rating. If you want to go the extra mile, which I always encourage people to do, leave a review. Just write one line, which says what you love about the podcast, or which episode you think a new listener should start with. That goes further than you can probably imagine in terms of getting us higher in the search results and just helping other guests come onto the show and understanding that we're doing good work here. Thank you very much in advance for that.

I look forward to hopefully, seeing you back here next week with another story about someone just like me and you taking a leap of faith in the direction of their purpose. Until then, keep trusting your intuition, keep following your heart, keep taking those leaps of faith. If no one's told you recently that they believe in you, I believe in you. Thank you very much and have a great day.

[END]