

LaDawn: LaDawn Preuninger, 38, and Jacksonville, Alabama.

Interviewer: Jacksonville, Alabama. Beautiful. LaDawn when we were in the kitchen yesterday you overheard me talking about my conversation with your daughter Sabrina, and what struck me most about my conversation with Sabrina is the come – so I'm expecting a little baby girl and swear to God I had the following thought, "If my baby girl has the same feeling of freedom and empowerment and limitlessness that Sabrina has when she graduates from college I would feel like a tremendous success as a parent." You also said Jonathan, "Why do you want me on camera I am not a success story." Creating the lives that you've created how can you not feel like a success story?

LaDawn: In that aspect I do. Sorry tears already. In that aspect I do because I think for me I've always tried really hard – sorry I talk with my hands.

Speaker 3: Be natural.

LaDawn: Tried really hard to teach my girls not to be what society thinks they should be, but to be who they are and to be comfortable and confident in who they are. And so, it's never been like you know I have one that is on the slimmer side and one that is on the curvier side. I never wanted them to feel a lot of the things that I felt, and so for me just be happy in who you are because everything else can kind of fall into place and people either complement your life or they complicate your life, and if they complicate it then most likely they're not the type of people that should be in it. So, when it comes to my kids I am super proud and definitely feel like – it's not been easy we had our struggles and our tragedies and stuff, but I do feel like in that aspect I pretty successful with my kids.

Interviewer: So you hedged what you said there you said pretty successful. What made you say pretty successful?

LaDawn: Because nobody is perfect. I always think there's a lot of room for improvement just room for improvement in life in general to always be doing things and trying to be better whether it's just making a better choice, learning from what you've done that maybe wasn't a good choice. And we've had to go through some of that with our youngest and stuff, and so I think that there's room for improvement and she is not – I always tell my kids I'm not here to be your friend. I'm here to be your parent and to make sure you're productive member of society and that you're respectful. We can be friends when you move out of the house and are successful, and living on your own, and doing

what you should be doing and so there's room for improvement. She is still growing, so I have been successful to this point and I feel like there's still room to grow.

Interviewer: So, you said something along the lines of, and correct me if I'm misrepresenting this, I LaDawn said, "I'm pretty successful because I am not perfect yet."

LaDawn: Correct.

Interviewer: And there's room for improvement. Do you believe that the only way to be successful is to be perfect?

LaDawn: No, because I don't think that perfect exists because I know super successful people in life they've got money, and cars, and whatever the general people think of as good and that's what they thrive for. We have a tendency to live our life day-to-day. I don't worry about 6 months down the road or a year down the road. We live in the moment and if we want to travel we travel like we pack our bags we get in the car and we go. So, is life perfect? It's never perfect, but I think that as humans we have to strive to do better and we have to teach our children to do better because otherwise the world just starts to crumble and we see it every day. So, it's not about being perfect, but it's about choosing to do better and every day you have a choice to do better.

Interviewer: Are you choosing to do better?

LaDawn: Yeah, I definitely – I'm conscious of all the choices that I make and the consequence is that's how I raise my kids. Every choice you make has a consequence. Sometimes they are freaking awesome, sometimes they suck, and so you have to think about the choices you make before you make them. Everything is a choice and sometimes they are simple choices it's just am I going to put creamer in my coffee today, no I'll pass that. There's always a choice and I think everything you do you make those choices, and so do I always make the best choice? No, I don't but you learn from it and the next time you make a better choice, and so you strive to continue to grow and do better.

Interviewer: Got you. So, if you LaDawn are choosing to be better and your loved ones are objectively doing better why aren't you a success story?

LaDawn: I guess in my mind...

Interviewer: Don't fight your chest.

LaDawn: Because I guess in my mind success in the reference to you, you know...

Interviewer: I'm just saying success.

LaDawn: Okay. So because I – give me a second.

Interviewer: Take your time.

LaDawn: Because I struggled so much with my weight and I feel like it doesn't matter what I do it's the pretty face, and that's a little frustrating because I'm more than that. And even so much so that even yesterday standing in the dining room without meaning any harm it was brought up again, and then I know that there is no – it wasn't meant to be ugly, but it's frustrating to be classified as a pretty face. And so, I just feel like I am defined by my face and that's it, because I am fat and that's hurtful, so yeah.

Interviewer: So, you don't feel like a success because you believe that other people see you as nothing but a pretty face?

LaDawn: Yep, because everything is – people are very judgy and it's just crazy that people base your success on how you look and what you have. I have a great life, I have a great family, I have a great house, I have new cars like I have what most people want in their life. I have a fabulous job you know my kids are awesome, but I feel like when people see me that's not what they see. They see lazy and they see someone who compulsively overeats or eats out all the time, and none of that's true. None of it's true, and even shopping to come here. I had ordered some stuff and it didn't come in, so I ran to one of the local stores. The sales clerk literally made eye contact with me when I walked in looked me up and down and literally didn't talk to me or make eye contact with me the entire time I was in the store, and when I checked out she barely even talked to me and did not even look at me. How do you not take that personal? And so, I don't feel like a success, because I'm still trying to measure up for everybody and that's a little frustrating because I've taught my own kids you don't have to do that but yet I still strive to, so it's frustrating.

Interviewer: When did I feel like people see me as just a pretty face, start?

LaDawn: I was probably about 15 and it's funny because looking back I was maybe a size 10. Played softball, super active in high school and someone made a comment because back then it was popular to get glamour shots, and so I had glamour shots done and my mom and them were looking through them and someone – the photographer said something about she should model, and I don't remember if it was someone with us

or someone in the store that we were in, the shop, said something but she would need to lose some of that weight you know she's got such a pretty face, but she would definitely have to lose some of that weight. And that moment, you know at 15 you just kind of go, "What?" You know like that's not a compliment, and so it just stuck. It just stuck and it's been – I can honestly say I know that I have worked so hard in my life to always do better, to outshine everybody else, to do more than what everybody else did because I was just a pretty face and that wasn't what I wanted to be defined as, but that was the category I got grouped in, and so fought with it ever since.

Interviewer: And that battle with that categorization how did that affect your actions and the way you lived your life from 15 for the next 15 years?

LaDawn: I quit school my junior year. I lacked three credits to graduate as a junior.

Interviewer: From?

LaDawn: What do you mean from?

Interviewer: From high school?

LaDawn: From high school. I took my GED instead. I was the kind of person that – I didn't care who you were. If you picked a fight I fought, because I'd proved myself. I had to always prove I was better. So, I was a fighter, I got suspended multiple times. Actually the reason I quit school was I had a girl that was bullying me, but she wouldn't touch me and dad had one rule in our house you never threw the first hit, so she wouldn't touch me but I couldn't fit in. It was a new school and it was just terrible. So, I was like I'm done. It's not worth it. So, I went and took my GED went to work, and went to college in my 20s, and have worked excel since because I had actually planned law school and when I quit school I felt like that was not an option. So, I end up getting married at 18. Had my first daughter when I was 20, went to college when she was like 2 I think got my Bachelor's degree and stayed married for about 13 years but lot of infidelity, and so constantly trying to prove. And we don't even need to get into all the – with him, but you know just constantly trying to prove and do better. Started working full-time from home for a company and actually made VP within about 2 years time with her and stayed there for many years and everything. But it was just always – I was always looking for the next thing I could do that would prove I was a little bit better than somebody else, and that's just what I have done my whole life. I strive on doing good, because otherwise I don't have anything else because it's a face. You know what I'm saying and that's just it, and

so I have to prove that I'm better that I can do stuff, and that's just how I've done everything.

Interviewer: When do you feel like you will have proven that?

LaDawn: I don't know. I don't know if I'll ever feel that I have proven that. I don't know in the back of my mind I have fought with this for so long like I don't know if losing my weight will help or not, because I have struggled with it for so long that it's just part of who I am, and so I've done really good as far as teaching the girls you know do your best and always try harder to do better and that's just isn't everything but I try to make sure it's not in the negative light like what I've done but more just to be a good person. Like my girls are great in school and stuff like we found what works for them, and so they excel at that. And when they don't instead of it being like some big catastrophe it's like what can you do differently, and so it's not a negative light for them that has been for me, because to me the way I do it is because I have to prove and I don't want them to feel that way. But I'm sure they probably see me doing it.

Interviewer: You just said I have to prove. I have to prove that what, complete the sentence?

LaDawn: I have to prove that I'm just as good as anybody else.

Interviewer: To who?

LaDawn: To myself and to people who think less. I feel like people look at me, and they don't see the success of my life. They see gluttony and all that stuff that's just not there. So, it's like proving I am not that person.

Interviewer: You said you need to prove to other people and also to yourself. When you look in the mirror does the person who looks back at you believe that you're enough?

LaDawn: No, and I don't look in the mirror. I try not to. I think I am probably my own worst critic just because I hate just the way I see myself you know it's negative, and just that's not the first I am. I don't go places because I don't want to be judged, so I don't go, and so like the fun loving person that I was it's not there, and it's frustrating.

Interviewer: Do you think other people will ever see you different than you see yourself?

LaDawn: I'd like to say I don't care, but I do care. I would hope that – you know the people that know me you know they know me but I don't know. I don't know if – I follow some plus-size models and stuff, super successful women like in Instagram and stuff

and if you go to their pages and here they are. They're beautiful. The hateful comments even when they're like they're super models literally and they still aren't good enough for people. It's just crazy to me that that's the standard that's there, so honestly I don't know if people will see me different regardless.

Interviewer: Just for a moment let's forget about other people. If you won't look in the mirror how could you ever see yourself the way you truly are?

LaDawn: I don't know. Because what I see and what I feel I think a lot of people like for me I don't feel like a big girl, and then I see pictures and I see video where I see myself in the mirror and it's like ooh when did that happen because I don't feel that way. And so, for me it's like – and it's frustrating because I tried – I definitely make better choices as far as food and things like that. And I think part of not feeling like a success I don't see the weight change and that's just hard to stay encouraged with. But at the same time I kind of feel like after trying all the things that I've tried, and I've tried a lot, how could this be wrong, and so I just in mind is like I'm determined and eventually there's definitely days where I do my makeup I'm oh you know just don't look down. And it's a product of wanting to be accepted and to fit in and not be judged. So, I don't know.

Interviewer: The only reason I'm going down the line of questioning is the more and more that we learn about how the human body and mind works the more we're learning that feelings of shame are toxic, and like physically change the way your body operates, and that shame is more fattening than anything you could ever eat, ever, ever. Can you imagine a world where you are free from shame?

LaDawn: I can imagine it. I told someone one time the way I see my journey is I have a lot of swampland and I am planting lavender because I love lavender. It's going to take a little time for the lavender to take root and hold into the swampy lands, but before long I'm going to have field lavender and the swampland is going to get like – it's just going to go away. And so, when those nasty voices – because we all have that, I don't care you know it's there like when you are struggling with your weight that inner voice is the harshest and most vicious voice ever, and then there are people that are like – there is a saying or something on Facebook or somewhere that was like we would never allow someone to stand in front of us and say to us what like that voice is saying, and that's so true. I had literally, and I know it sounds crazy, but when that starts I literally go shut up like stop. And I imagine like planting my lavender. Just you know there's good stuff in there and I'm a good person I help people and things like I feel good, and like just keep planting your lavender because eventually they're going to take seed because there are

just going to be too many of them not to, and that negative voice is going to be pushed out, and so that's what I do. I plant my lavender field.

Interviewer: I love that metaphor. Without using a metaphor or a simile what has to happen for you to be free from shame?

LaDawn: I have to lose this weight bottom line.

Interviewer: Before you can be free from shame?

LaDawn: Hmm, hmm because this weight is a product of a lot of negative – because when I was 15 I was like a size 10. I wasn't even big, but my body like in my mind it was so bad that I wasn't as thin as my girlfriends, and so bad relationships and bad choices and all of that that's what this is from, and so for me it's gaining back control that I gave away. And to me it's about being in control of my life and my choices, and not being ashamed of the things that I've done or the weight that I gained or just circumstances or whatever. If I got upset I'd go through, drive through and sit in the car, eat my double cheese burger and cry the whole time I did it. I don't do that anymore. So, that to me is huge, but the results of it are still here and so it would be nice for that to go. Decided to be who I am, who I feel like on the inside versus what I look like on the outside.

Interviewer: So, I heard you say that I LaDawn cannot be free from shame until I lose the weight. If we look at that statement another way to interpret that is that it is shameful to have that weight. How could you ever be free from the weight and free from shame if you believe that the weight is shame and shame is the weight?

LaDawn: I don't know and maybe that's why I struggle with it. I don't know. If I had those answers I would probably be better. But that's how I feel.

Interviewer: What if you weren't ashamed of your weight?

LaDawn: That's a big word 'what if'. I don't know, because it's a big part of everything. To go shopping is a challenge. God forbid my kids want something from a drive-through, if I am driving it's like I get the bag and I hand it directly to – you know like that's not mine, so I don't know.

Interviewer: But just what if you were no longer ashamed of your weight what would happen?



LaDawn: I don't know because I've always been that way. So, I don't know what that would feel like.

Interviewer: So it sounds like you can literally not even imagine not being ashamed and not having the weight?

LaDawn: Because I've had it for as long as I can remember.

Interviewer: So, if you can't imagine it how could it ever be possible, because on some level you're saying to yourself the definition of not possible is something you can't even fathom. So, how if you can't even fathom, if you can't even give yourself permission, if you won't give yourself permission to being free from this how could you ever be free from this?

LaDawn: Yeah. I don't know what that will feel like. I really don't.

Interviewer: Do you feel like your husband has given you permission to be free from shame?

LaDawn: Oh, yeah.

Interviewer: Do you feel like your daughters have given you permission to be free from shame?

LaDawn: Hmm, hmm.

Interviewer: Why haven't you given you permission to be free from shame? What has to happen for you to give you permission to be free from shame?

LaDawn: I don't know.

Interviewer: What if you just decided? What if you chose to be free from shame?

LaDawn: It's...

Interviewer: How would you stand up from that chair?

LaDawn: I don't know.

Interviewer: No, just like if I asked you to stand up from the chair and I want you to describe it to me how you stand up from the chair what would you say?



LaDawn: I would just stand up. I don't know.

Interviewer: Right?

LaDawn: Yeah.

Interviewer: You just stand up?

LaDawn: And again it's a choice, but to live it and do it and to control all of it.

Interviewer: Why do you need to control it?

LaDawn: Because it's been such a big part that that's all I know. You can't help but think what other people are thinking, you can't help but see the looks and overhear the comments, and then as soon as that happens it's like that just the barrage of just like the hatefulness in your own head is just – and if I knew how to shut that off that would be different, but I don't know how to shut that off that's the whole thing as far as like I said just trying to visualize like stop, you know we've got lavender fields to plant and that's what I go back to because to me that's beautiful and that's good, and I don't know how to turn off everything else. So, I do other things. I work hard that's just what I do. So, I don't know I can't answer that, because I don't know.

Interviewer: When did you make the choice to love your husband?

LaDawn: I don't know it just happened. There's no judgment, there's no expectation, and there's no condition and so you just feel accepted no matter what. I mean he sees you at your best, he sees you at your worst and he is still there, you know he sees you without the makeup and the morning breath and all that stuff, and so just feel the unconditional acceptance. And it's easy to choose to keep that.

Interviewer: Maybe your husband could teach you a little bit about what it means to see you without shame because it sounds like...

LaDawn: He tries.

Interviewer: It sounds like he does it pretty well.

LaDawn: Yeah, you know his favorite thing is when I have a baseball hat on my hair is pulled up and we're heading out to go kayaking no makeup or anything, so you know hey. But it's...

Interviewer: The only reason I ask that question is because earlier you said you can't even imagine what it would be like to see yourself without feeling shame, but maybe you can. It would be seeing yourself the way your husband sees you or seeing yourself the way your daughters see you?

LaDawn: Possibly I guess, yeah.

Interviewer: Because it seems like on some level if you truly feel it's impossible to see yourself as being enough it's going to be really hard to ever see yourself as enough, but you are so blessed to have at least three people in your life who have proven that it's possible to see you as being enough more than enough. So, the possibility is there?

LaDawn: When you put it that way, yeah.

Interviewer: How does it make you feel to know concretely that it is possible to see yourself as enough?

LaDawn: My brain automatically goes to well they're family they kind of have to, so it's you know...

Interviewer: Matt doesn't have to?

LaDawn: No he doesn't.

Interviewer: How does it make you feel to know that someone who isn't required to see you as enough?

LaDawn: I definitely feel blessed. I think part of it is the fact that I know he loves me, and while he doesn't have to and it's a choice he sees what I wish other people see. He sees me struggle, he sees all of that, and so he sees the choices that I make and so do the girls, and so it's less about having to prove it to them because they see it. They know that I'm not sitting around on my couch all day eating candy and junk food, hitting every drive-through in town. They know that that stuff is not true, and like with my girls I'm just mom. I didn't teach them to not be accepting, so they're the type of kids that are just accepting anybody it doesn't matter. So, maybe I taught or I don't know maybe that's a byproduct. You know you teach them what you – so that that way they don't feel that way.

Interviewer: What do you think your daughters and your husband do to accept you?

LaDawn: There's no judgment, there's no – I don't know they just do. I don't know. I don't know that they do anything. I don't know.

Interviewer: Maybe it sounds a little bit like the act of them accepting you as sort of like the act of you standing up. They just accept you?

LaDawn: It is what it is. This is mom.

Interviewer: What if you could just accept you? What would happen?

LaDawn: I don't know. I still think I would be caught up in what everybody else thinks. It's part of my weight loss journey. There have been times where like I'm super determined, going to get it off, going to get it off, and then there has been times of you know what this is me if you don't like it don't look at me, don't talk to me like just you're not worth my time. And during those times people are like oh you're so confident. No I'm not confident I just choose not to have your crap, but in the back of your mind you're still going if I could just get this dam weight off. I accept a lot of things in life you know like I'm not scared of dying. I don't live my life that way, and there are things that I don't care of people like I'd ride a crotch rocket. I'm a big girl who cares you know I don't see you out there doing it. So, there are lots of things like just I don't care. It would be nice just not to care in general as far as everybody else is thinking. I can't imagine not doing that though. I really can't. I don't know what that feels like. I don't walk into a room and just walk into the room. I walk through the door thinking please God don't let me be the only big girl in the room. I don't know what that feels like not to do; I mean I even ask is the chair going to hold me. I don't know what it feels like not to worry about that stuff. I don't so it's hard for me to even imagine 'what ifs' because I don't know. I don't think about it because I kind of feel like it's not going to happen for me, so why imagine it. I have a friend that just had the gastric sleeve done and she has dropped 80 pounds in like two-and-a-half months, and she looks fabulous. I told Matt like I don't want to be envious of someone who has to modify her body to do that, but it's hard not to because you know I've tried everything. And I want to be able to just be me and not worry about like my knee is hurting or my feet are hurting or my back hurting or being out of breath or fitting into a chair or finding clothes like just be me and I don't know what that feels like.

Interviewer: You made this statement it's not going to happen, what if scientifically your body knew that you believed it's not going to happen?

LaDawn: Yeah, I believe in power of words and it's funny because in my house it's a running joke. Don't talk about my girls being pregnant because I'm going to have to hurt

somebody, even just joking like I believe in powerful words, and so that would be interesting. But definitely like I don't know the science behind that, and so maybe I am my own worst enemy here and if that's the case like definitely need to have a little inner conversation I guess. And for me it's not about me it's then – I would just like to be comfortable. So, yeah I hadn't really thought about it that way.

Interviewer: Interesting.

LaDawn: Yeah.

Interviewer: it's cool. Thinking about it that way now how does that make you feel?

LaDawn: It kind of makes me go okay if that's the case come on get it together you know like it's like doing everything right, but still you're doing everything right but all this is still wrong.

Interviewer: I don't mean to interrupt you, but can I just challenge the path you're going on for one second?

LaDawn: Sure.

Interviewer: Imagine if – right now we're in Seattle, Washington and you wanted to go to New York City, and you had all the gas in the tank, tires full of air, AC cranked up, listening to Five Finger Death Punch and your car was facing west. But you've been slamming on the gas pedal over and over again but you're pointed west, are you a stupid fool who should be ashamed and get her shit together or what if you decided to turn your car east?

LaDawn: It seems too simplistic, I mean it's common sense turn around you know as our GPS constantly tells us even when we're headed in the right direction make the next available U-turn.

Interviewer: What does that U-turn look like in your life?

LaDawn: Just letting it go I guess.

Interviewer: Say it again.

LaDawn: Just letting it go.

Interviewer: Say it again.

LaDawn: You're trying to make me cry. Just let it go.

Interviewer: What are you letting go?

LaDawn: Everything.

Interviewer: Specifically what are you letting go?

LaDawn: All the shame, and the guilt, and the frustration, and the fear just all of it.

Interviewer: How does it feel to let that go?

LaDawn: Like a mountain is gone.

Interviewer: Is it all gone?

LaDawn: No it'll take a little time.

Interviewer: Are you going to let it go?

LaDawn: I will definitely do my best.

Interviewer: Who is going to help you let it go?

LaDawn: I don't know. My family.

Interviewer: How does it make you feel to know that you're letting it go and you've got a family that's going to help you?

LaDawn: It feels good.

Interviewer: Yeah.

LaDawn: You know it sucks to carry that. It does it sucks.

Interviewer: Have you seen the movie Frozen?

LaDawn: Oh, of course who hasn't seen Frozen? My kids are teenagers and I'm still seeing Frozen.

Interviewer: It sounds like we got a new theme song?

LaDawn: Yeah.

Interviewer: Right.

LaDawn: Yeah, don't ask me to sing. Can't [inaudible 00:46:08] tune in a bucket with a lid, so yeah?

Interviewer: Beautiful. Cool. Thanks LaDawn.