

JoAnna Blocker (00:00):

A few years ago I won an award and it was called the Phoenix Award. When they called my name, I almost thought, "Oh dear, they got the wrong person." At the ceremony, they actually read a poem right before I received the award.

JoAnna Blocker (00:14):

It said, "Like a phoenix from the ashes, they may defeat you, burn you, insult you, and abandon you. But they will not, and shall not, and cannot destroy you. For you, like Rome, were built on ashes and you, like a phoenix, know how to resurrect."

JoAnna Blocker (00:35):

At that moment I laughed and then they said my name, of course. At that moment I just started laughing thinking oh my. I want to share a story about my brother and I. When he was eight and I was four years old, it was a big day. The event was Alan's birthday. Birthdays were a big deal in our household. We celebrated and it's all about them all day. We had everything ready. All we needed was the cake. So what we did is my mom and I, and my brother all got in a car. We went to the store and we got their cake. On the way coming back, there was a moment where everything was so happy. The celebration in the car, because we knew it was my brother's birthday. We were all going to get to open his presents and stuff.

JoAnna Blocker (01:23):

But there was a moment that in the car the energy immediately changed. I could feel a sense of panic in my mom. Her eyes changed. She was driving. When she was driving the steering wheel her hand started really clenching hold of the steering wheel. When we looked over to the right, we saw this big black smoke, which at that time I can remember I seen it. Me and my brother were in the backseat. I remember seeing it and thinking, well, that's different. I've never seen that before.

JoAnna Blocker (01:58):

Everything went silent. My mom wasn't joking anymore. Everything was quiet. When we drove down the road, we came up to our home. Our home was completely burning and going into ashes. At that moment, I was only four, my brother was eight. My mom and my brother and I all got out of the vehicle. There was police officers around, ambulance all around. You could see the chaos was going on and my mom placed my brother and I right beside the car and said, "No matter what, y'all hold hands, stay still and do not move." Everything that we ever owned, every dream, every aspiration, everything that we had was gone in that moment.

JoAnna Blocker (02:49):

But the main thing that was going on was my brother and I were standing there with our hands held. We knew no matter what that we had each other. My mom would come circling around to me and my brother and saying, "You guys are okay." She never asked us, "Are you okay?" But she would always say, "You are okay and no matter what we will celebrate Alan's birthday."

JoAnna Blocker (03:13):

I can remember looking up at the sky. I was like oh my God, it's snowing black snowflakes. Well, as a four year old, I was thinking it was snowflakes. Now I can think, wow, the ashes were actually falling on us, but we still had love. We still had joy and we had a resilience built within us.

JoAnna Blocker (03:34):

Moving forward to an early childhood behavioral specialist, I have to give many parents information that possibly their child may be on the autism spectrum disorder. Or I may have to give parents information about how their extreme behaviors may be with them for the rest of their life. These children and these little people are only three, four and five year olds. That is really difficult but I always want to give the families a sense that these children will be able to have resilience. That there is people out there that will help, and that will guide them, and that will support them.

JoAnna Blocker (04:17):

When I actually give the information to the parents, I always say, "Hey, do you love to dance? Because I love to dance." They're always laughing and they look at me really strange, but I want them to understand that I'm their new dance partner. If they like hip hop, or jazz, or country or line dance whatever, they may like, I will learn their steps to guide them through whatever. So I always kind of package to say, "You didn't ask for me to be your dance partner. I know you don't want this information about your child or your student that may have a learning disability. Or your child, that student that may have an impairment, but I am here to help you and I am here and I will be with you to guide you through this dance."

JoAnna Blocker (05:04):

That through this early childhood experience and the journey, academic journey, your child will succeed because they have parents, they have directors, they have teachers, they have quality early childhood that surrounds them to give them ultimately the best that they can get at this moment. There are people to help you. There is support surrounding you. So maybe at the end of the day, I am a Phoenix and you're a Phoenix too. Let's guide each other through. Let's laugh, let's live, let's learn. We may mess up, but we for sure will dance and have fun.