

Alyssa : Hello. Hi Brandi. How are you?

Brandi : I'm good, Alyssa. How are you, nonstop, action diva dancing queen beyond belief beyond everything!

Alyssa : Now, that's an intro girl, I've got to get that recorded.

Brandi : I got you boo. I'll splice it for you and send it to you.

Alyssa : So, uh, I, I've just been a whirlwind the last like two weeks. It's just, yeah, it's, it's, it's a reminder that hard work, perseverance, um, don't dream it, be it. And you know, believing that we all have a journey. We all have a dream. We all have, we all have that, that chapter in our life that's extremely, um, important. This is where I'm at and I'm just overwhelmed with just how proud I am of not only myself just of life in everything that I've like kind of work too. I mean, I'm, I'm kind of like stumped for words. I'm never stumped but the feeling it's just overwhelming.

Brandi : And you realized that Dallas is like super proud of you, right? Like you realized that this city you captured, like you already have the captured, you know, with everything that you've done for the community and the pageantry. Like even before all of this you had all of Dallas's heart and, and now it's like, oh my God, like it couldn't have happened. Like the thing that I keep hearing from everybody is that it couldn't have happened to a better person. So I mean it is, you have all of Dallas rooting for you and 150 percent behind you. And like everybody says, I'm going to reiterate it over and over again. It couldn't have happened to a better or a better person. You are a beautiful person and you know, everybody knows, you know about Alyssa, you know, Beyond Belief, Rupaul's Drag Race, all of that, you know, amazing thing you put your life out there. But what is like one thing that all of these communities may not know about you?

Alyssa : I think that, um, exactly what Dancing Queen dancing queen really, really showed was the Justin Johnson demand underneath the mask, you know, the demand. I'm behind the dress. I think that, and something that people really don't know about me is what this place. I don't know if I shared everything was a hallmark of my life. I knew when that was presented to me, I did not want to be, I'm not, but I didn't want to be a part of the scripted. I didn't want that for my sacred place, for beyond belief, for my face that I've created a truly, truly was my space as a young, introverted, shy little awkward boy in Mesquite going to the studio for the very first time. I didn't have the words necessarily, but I could, I could tell that story through the art of my movement, which to me is the most powerful form of communication in my opinion.

Alyssa : And um, you know, I was very sensitive with this. I'm very sensitive with this project and when Netflix presented the Docu style series, I knew that it be perfect. So I'm, I'm, I'm a little surprised at myself that I allowed all with me because I think something people wouldn't know is that kind of am guarded and um, you know, there's that fear of maybe exposing too much of one and I just, I really liked soul searched about it and I thought, you know what, I'm just going to be my authentic, genuine, unapologetic self and in

share and maybe in hopes that this story, um, one star, another little Justin somewhere in the world,

Brandi : Most definitely. And along that same lines since the day that I've met you, like you have literally always danced to the beat of your own music and you literally did that. I think it was at the 2014 Miss Gay USofA final night, like you literally danced to your own music. It was awesome. But, so how do you keep, where does that strength come from, you know, amid all of the backtalk and the pageant police in the world and the haters. Where does your strength come from?

Alyssa : Oh, I, I just, I, I have, um, I protected my, my heart. And listen, when you, when you think, when you allow darkness in, it can trap you. And I've never done that. I've never that I went through a lot of my book of life is already written. It's just now being read out loud.

Brandi : Ah, that's beautiful.

Alyssa : There were many chapters that, that were dark that were like,

Alyssa : we're like, okay. But I, I was steadfast and I held tight to the hope for my future. And I'm glad kind of like in that movie, The Neverending Story, you know, when he's like reading the book, the pages are fast and the weathers coming, that's me. That's me. I'm reading my book and I'm like, okay, but, but hold tight is going to get better and keep going, keep going, keep going. And then, you know, here I am in chapter 38 and I'm so alive and I'm so alive. And I weathered those storms. I weathered the storm and you know, there were days I forgot my galoshes and my raincoat and umbrella and I was soaking wet. But, but at the end of the day I came home, I was blessed enough and fortunate enough to, to dry off and, you know, put on some warm. I think that if you allow yourself to indulge, if you allow yourself, and I think we had the, we have the opportunity to have the power. If you allow yourself to indulge in negativity, it can, um, it can engulf you. Okay. And um, you know, I don't, I didn't, I didn't want to get like sucked up by any of that. So I just stayed. I just stayed away. It was easier for me and look, Brandi, I'm very lucky because the balance between my life and drag its the studio, you know, it's like okay, I can leave off anything that happened to go to the studio and anytime they, anytime the moms were crazy at the studio, I could go to my shows, go on tour. So it was like, it was a good balance, you know,

Brandi : That's really interesting. I never really thought about that. Like as far like to keep that balance, you have to have like your own little private personal space and for you it's, it's movement and dance. Yeah. I think a lot of people like I know that is for me, like my sacred space is the dance studio or any place that I can release that kind of uh, emotion and, and process through my body, you know, through somatic awareness. And so I never really thought about that. And, and hearing you say that out loud, I mean, that makes sense. In order to balance the two, you've got to have a place for yourself and for you that's your dance studio and for you to allow cameras in there, like that's a big deal. You know, like that's, that's a big deal to open up. That's like opening up.

Alyssa : I was apprehensive like quite a few times and I thought, you know, here's this, I'm okay going on TV myself, you know, went on drag race. I was silly and you know, and, and, and, and I was okay with that, but I was like, I don't want to, um, you got to be careful with kids. You don't want to exploit that. There was a lot of, there's a lot of factors that go in with this and I knew that when, when this show was being in the creative process, I was very, like sincere and hopeful that this would be in, in a time in a world. Right now we need shows like that are hopefully and motivational, inspirational and above all. For me, Dancing Queen is a triumphant story and as you know, it, it, it never goes on for a season two or 22, I will say season one I'm so proud of. I'm proud of. Absolutely. The response has been so positive. Absolutely.

Brandi : My wife and I were saying this, it's like it's, it's so beautiful and inspiring and poetic and so needed to see a gay wedding. I officiated by a drag queen and then the next scene see kids. It's so inspiring to see these two things that people, you know, at least mainstream society thinks are two opposite ends of this and they're not there so together and you are part of that, you know, you are a part of bringing those and bridging those two together. And so you've seen and everything pretty much. I mean, you know, you've been doing drag for. I mean, I don't want to age you, so we're just going to say two years.

Alyssa : I always say, uh, just a few seconds. Ten seconds.

Brandi : We're just going to say you've been doing drag for two seconds.

Alyssa : Two seconds.

Brandi : So after all of these, you know, two seconds that you've been in the drag industry and, and in, in this whole experience, what does drag mean to you?

Alyssa : Oh my gosh. Well, I live in a very Bruce Wayne life, so drag is my Batman, you know, that's it. I said that. Yes, I know. Fifteen and 16. I wanted to be a choreographer. I knew that I wanted to be dance director. I knew that I want it to be a teacher. I knew these things I was very very I'm sure I was unsure of a lot of things, but I was sure of that. And you know, my granny was, she would always remind me, she's like, you always would be out there directing your sisters. And um, so I knew of that, you know, what drag was for me, it was my creative outlet to go on stage as a performer. It was like quenching my thirst I didn't realize there were so much more to drag. There could be a business with them and um, the opportunities that drag would allow me,

Alyssa : you know, and so I think drag was a place for me to go, okay, I can get my kids being a performer onstage and live my best life. And then going back to my daily routine the next day, hopefully place and Batman only comes out when he's called upon. And you know, and I think drag Queens, we do save people, we make people smile we make people laugh going to my very first drag show I found it to be so intriguing. I was so interested and I was really just intrigued by the audience. I would start watching the audience they would laugh they, and they would clap and then the claps would get louder and you know, it was like, oh, they're going along on this journey with this

entertainer. I was like, okay, this is so, this is so fascinating. Wildly fascinating. Um, and I think that's what it, that's what it meant for me.

Alyssa : Then I got into the pageantry and then, you know, you have to be careful with this. You have to be very careful with this, this world and here in the South demographically very serious, you know? Um, and then I thought, okay, I love this, I love this. But I think my first love was I don't think I know I'm certain my first love with the studio, so I don't ever feel like I. There were moments where I felt like I was being selfish, you know, um, because I was taken away from the kids if I wasn't there at rehearsal or something. And it was kind of rough for me at a time when the Miss America all about what's going on. It's just like, this is, I felt like wrong like, this is not what my life should be. I was blessed with this gift to teach the greatest gift I've ever received. I should be using that gift. I should be there at the studio. I not be galavanting across this country. And um, then it was like, okay, I need to take a break from this. I was allowing that, uh, excitement, that power, that rush that rush, that what it was, oh my gosh. Competed in a pageant.

Brandi : It's an adrenaline rush? It sure is, yes.

Alyssa : YES! Adrenaline! Yes! But you have to be very careful because it can engulf you. You just like take you in like, and for some, that's their calling. That's their purpose. For me it was like, Ugh, I'm torn because I like doing both of these, but I felt more obligated to be responsible with the kids. Does that make sense? A little bit? Yeah.

Brandi: No, totally. Yeah, that's

Alyssa : I feel like my role was so much bigger than just being a drag artist and performer. I, you know, but now so lucky that Alyssa could actually be a business, a business and in the platform that I'm on, it's like, okay, this, it all makes sense now. It all, it all makes sense and you have to be very, very, very strategic, you know, now a professional juggler because like last night I was at the studio and you know, the kids are like, Justin, this is why I dance and, and we're sharing stories and then we're like creating these pieces through our, our own life experiences. And when I left last night, my boyfriend, he also is a modern teacher and he teaches the high school. So we have that, uh, you know, our lives are very, very intertwined. So we are talking about it and while we're talking about, I get text messages from the kids just one by one.

Alyssa : And they're like, thank you for tonight. You know, it's these nights like this Justin where I'm reminded I'm, all the hard work is worth because of the feeling that I feel and, and, and for, for a moment, I sat in my room and I'm like, this is your purpose. And you did it, you made, you made sure you did not ignore those signs and your gifts. You did it, you did it. And I think I, I just, I'm, I'm very thankful for this chapter, chapter 38. I am so full of life and alive and I just, I mean I'm on the phone, you know, interviewing with you guys. I just did that my life, but I'm embracing everything that.

Brandi: So just even hearing you talk about sitting in and realizing that you are more than just a singular thing. Yes, drag is a part of your grander experience of Justin and, and, and your book, but how you're just now sitting and realizing that you are living out your purpose.

Like I think that's what every human in this world is seeking is just being able to sit back and go, I am sitting in and living out my purpose and that's just, I like to collect a little bit. I was like, I got a little teary eyed.

Alyssa : Well, I mean thank you because it's like, you know, a lot of times we forget to have these talks. We forget to have these chats not only with other people but with ourselves and it's important I'm a big journal person and one day I'm going to release this journal in a book 25 years of, but like I love to journal and I love to write and I love to write about my day and I love to write about things that I'm feeling and uh, believe it or not Brandi the, I think people see me as Alyssa who was a very bold and daring Joan Collins character. But underneath all that I'm a little, little, little, still have a little bit of a social awkward shyness in there. And I know it's very hard to believe, but there's definitely a little bit. I think that sometimes I'm like, I'm, I'm more standoffish because I think I'm more like, what do I say?

Alyssa : Do I not say, you know what I mean? It's like, do I interact or do not, does this sound right? I second guess myself, but you wouldn't think that if, if people meet my character like not at all, but when I get in drag. It's like I, I totally morph like a power ranger, I mean I morph and I, I mean I know, I know my character and I, I, I, then I, well I thought I knew and then I went on Drag Race and then I started working with Ru who really is my biggest mentor and inspiration at this point in my life. He was just so real and upfront with me and like, um, was introducing me to other things and he's like, do you know Justin that you're really funny? I'm like, I'm not, I don't think I'm funny. I'm being very serious with you. And he's like, you're very funny.

Alyssa : I was like, well, I'm not trying to be funny. I'm being very serious. And he's like, you're at camp drag queen. And I said, I'm really not. I'm really serious and getting frustrated and he's like, YOU ARE FUNNY right here that you don't even realize that you're funny? I don't know why you're saying this to me. Like why are you like, are you attacking me? Like, what is the conversation. It was like I learned more about myself and it's like, so this character development has been like a never ending process, but now I can say I'm very aware of my, of, of my character, you know, the power that that character has and I want to use it for greater needs. Now that's important.

Brandi: Speaking of greater needs and amazing gigs and amazing opportunities and, and having a mentor, I hear that you are now collaborating on a new gig that you know, we all your adoring fans and people can be a part of, so can you spill a little of that Camp Tazo tea?

Alyssa : This is one of the most exciting projects that I'm working on in 2019. And when this partnership came about, you know you get approached by these brands but for me I was like okay I'm busy so let's see if this can be something that could fit.

Alyssa : And I opened up the folder, you know, I'm sitting in my office, you got a picture of the whole thing and I'm like, this it says Brew the unexpected. I'm like, okay, that's interesting. A drag queen meets tea brands. Well that is unexpected because I thought instantly it's going to be. What's the tea? Spill the Tea. Tazo was very opening to hear my story and after seeing Dancing Queen they were inspired and they're like, Justin, after we talked about, you know, drag and how it go me out of my comfort zone. I was

shy. I, I was, I was all of these things but I felt so accepted as Alyssa and um, how it empowered me. And, and they're like, well, what, what, what was, what was some of your favorite things as a child? And I said, you know, one of seven I was self-entertained by my highlight of my year was going to church camp once a year and I would leave that camp after seven days and I would be beyond motivated, ready to conquer the world.

Alyssa : And it was exactly what I needed every year to get ready to go to school because I would have anxiety, like, you know, a meeting these kids and things. And um, they're like, that's it. We want to create a camp that will encourage people to get out of their comfort zones. And you will be the inaugural camp director. And literally Brandi, for three days people are going to come to this camp and spend three days with me and I'm going to meet them in full Texas drag and we're going to do all, all things Alyssa Edwards inspired activities, whether that's like learning choreography. Some people are very timid to dance and dance is good for the heart and the soul even stuff sitting around the campfire roasting marshmallows like sharing life stories and experiences. For me, I say simple at one time it wasn't. So I think that this is such a cool project. I don't know if you've gotten to see the images yet

Alyssa : But some of these activities of me canoeing and like, in drag it's like what the hell is this?! You know, it was so great. It was fabulous. And I'm so I, I'm very, very, like I'm inspired now that Tazo is like an all inclusive brand is really driven by motivation and inspiration and you know, I think it's more than just a partnership now. It's a collaboration. So, uh, yeah, camptazo.com. GURL! YOU SHOULD SUBMIT! Brandi SUBMIT TO COME! To the camp. You and your wife!

Brandi: I think, I know, I was like, you know what she's talking about this and I'm like, this sounds like right up my, Oh my God, I'm totally going to apply.

Alyssa : We're going to be out there for three days and we're going to be at the camp for three days and like this is going to be full excitement and um, I just, I'm so excited for this. I'm thinking about even having some of the kids come, they be assisting just a lot of activities that are going to push people. Yeah. So for me I was like, this is a perfect fit for me. It is everything I stand for, believe it. I got to be a part of this ya girl, 2019, I'm going to be camping!

Brandi: You're going to be glamping girl. So what is the process? How can, how can you know, tell everybody how they can get involved or the application. How does it all go down

Alyssa : Go to camptazo.com. There'll be more guidelines there but there will be like, why do you want to come? Gotcha. What do you know more about yourself? And it's one of those kinds of things. It's not, you know, um, and, and, and I applaud Tazo for just being so open. This, this is very unique. We don't, we don't hear things like this. It's like I get approached by these brands and it's more about this is the role, can you play it? And I'm like, well, ...

Brandi: You're too creative for that this is creative for that.

Alyssa : Right! And it's Brew the Unexpected. It just, it's perfect. I was like, this is it, yea. Yes, Yeah, so that's kind of my life in a nutshell.

Brandi: And I know you're super busy and um, I know that you need to go, but I have one last question for you before you take on your next interview or conquer the world with whatever else you're going to do.

Brandi : So I know that and I think that we as a marginalized community, you know, queer people of color and nonconforming, I think we need more visible role models who are harnessing this otherness, this idea of otherness, whether that, like I said, be queer, ability, you know, whatever into their power. And so for a lot of us, I know that for me, uh, you are one of those kinds of role models. And so what advice do you have to people in our community who, like you, are trying to bridge their drag and their creative and their queer LGBTQ selves with their real world career ambitions.

Alyssa : Oh, that's a good question. Okay. Um, honestly I'm gonna. Speak from the heart. Just follow, follow the yellow brick road and know that know that your yellow brick road is your yellow brick road and there is an OZ and you're gonna get to obstacles and um, it's important not to give up, to find a way to maneuver around or over. And I think for me, my Dorothy experience is I now know I have the power where Dorothy needed a man behind the curtain. It always lies within. Drag did that for me, drag was my wizard. So now you know

Alyssa : the man behind the curtain is Justin. I've realized that I think it's important. Realize your strengths, understand that the role and the platform is bigger than what you think. So turn that microphone on high and share it, share your stories. Be available, be relatable. Be understanding. Um, I think there's so many things that I've learned in my 38 years, um, and I, I'm, I'm, I, I continue to not only be a teacher but a student I know I'm hoping for the next and you know, 98 years of my life that I continued down this yellow brick road open to anything that and everyone that I meet along the way

Alyssa : And I believe in OZ.

Brandi: Oh my God, that is beautiful. Last. No, that needs to be like your new merge. Like I believe in with your face plastered all over it. Thank you so, so much. I appreciate everything that you are bringing to this art form that you're bringing into this world that you're bringing into our community. You are a beacon of light and I cannot wait to help you shine it and I can't wait to see what goes down at camp Tazo. I'm just so excited for you and I'm just sending you so much light.

Alyssa : Thank you so much girl. Thank you. And it was like, I gotta tell you, wait Brandi, Brandi, I gotta tell you though real quick, if people like you though, um, you know, I've read your writings before, I think you're so positive. I've seen you judge these pageants, be a part of this community, represent a national system yourself. I, I just want to say thank you. Thank you for being a face and an advocate and a leader and a role model and, you know, I hope that our community can continue, you know, as a group as a whole, um,

and, and pushing, pushing towards that greater, that greater picture, the grander picture of it all. And that's for a hopeful future. So thank you.

Brandi: You just made me cry.

Alyssa : Well, I, I absolutely, I don't want you to know. Not only do I see it, I recognize it and I celebrate it. So, you know, just congratulations to you too. To you too. Thank you.

Brandi: Thank you so much. I hate you for making me cry, but I love you.

Alyssa : You're so sweet; you just made my day! You have a great day, give your wife and we need to have coffee one day.

Brandi: Yes we do. I love you so much. Okay, bye.