

Transcript

Intro

0:00

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0:07

Hi.

0:09

I'm Maisie Williams.

0:11

And I'm kind of just waiting for someone to come on stage

0:14

and tell me that there's been some sort of miscommunication,

0:17

and that I should probably leave.

0:20

No?

0:23

Damn it.

0:24

(Laughter)

0:26

So, some of you may know me as an actress.

0:30

(Cheers) (Laughter)

0:32

Some of you may know me for my really average tweets.

0:36

(Cheers)

0:38

Oh, yeah.

0:40

And some of you may be finding out who I am for the first time right now.

0:44

Hello.

0:46

Whether you knew me before or not,

0:48

you're probably wondering what I'm going to talk to you about today.

0:52

And I would be lying if I said

0:55

it didn't take me one or two sleepless nights,

0:57

trying to figure that out, too.

0:59

At last, here I am.

1:01

Upon finding out the news that I would be giving a TEDx Talk,

1:05

I did what I think most people do

1:07

and watched about 50 TED talks back-to-back,

1:10

and read "Talk like TED" by Carmine Gallo for some inspiration.

1:15

Was I inspired?

1:18

Yes and no.

1:20

Did it make me want to go out and change the world?

1:23

Hell yeah.

1:24

Did it make me feel like a totally inadequate public speaker

1:28

with absolutely no point to make,

1:30

who was definitely in need of a big thesaurus if she wants to keep up?

1:34

Indeed.

1:36

What could I possibly say that would have any impact?

1:40

What point am I trying to make?

1:42

And who the hell thought it was a good idea to give me a TEDx talk?

1:49

So here's the part where I tell you what I know:

1:52

I'm the youngest of four siblings.

1:55

My parents divorced when I was four months old.

1:58

I really was the icing on the cake of a terrible marriage.

2:01

(Laughter)

2:03

I have two step siblings who are younger than me

2:07

and a half brother who's older than all of us.

2:10

I grew up in a three-bedroom council house

2:13

with four of my six siblings just outside of Bristol.

2:17

I went to a very ordinary school.

Childhood

2:20

I got very ordinary grades.

2:23

I wasn't quite good enough to get a gold star,

2:26

and I also wasn't quite bad enough to be kept after school.

2:30

I walked that nice center line where if I kept my mouth shut in class,

2:34

then I could probably get away

2:36

with not being spoken to you by teachers for weeks on end.

2:40

Everything about me was pretty damn ordinary,

2:43

except for how I felt on the inside.

2:47

I had big dreams.

2:50

Shock.

2:53

From as young as I can remember,

2:55

I have dreamed of becoming a professional dancer.

3:00

There are certain memories from my childhood

3:02

that I would really rather forget.

3:05

But during those times of immense pain,

3:08

I found myself instinctively walking over to my mother's CD player,

3:12

cranking up the volume to drown out the noise

3:15

and letting my body move to the beat.

3:19

It's hard to describe how it felt.

3:22

I was harnessing emotions that I didn't even really know the names of yet.

3:26

I was summoning all of this energy

3:28

and feeling it flow through my body and out of my fingertips.

3:33

I was alone in my own head, and I felt the most alive.

3:39

I didn't really know much about the big wide world then,

3:42

but I knew that this feeling was addictive;

3:45

and I was going to stop at nothing until I made it my profession.

3:50

At eight years old, I was enrolled in dance class.

3:54

And by ten, I informed my mother

3:57

that I didn't want to go to school anymore.

Stage School

4:01

I wanted to be like Billy Elliot and go to stage school.

4:05

This was the first opportunity or challenge I was presented with.

4:11

Even as young as ten,

4:13

I was willing to give up all of my friends and go away to board at a private school,

4:19

away from my siblings, away from my mom.

4:23

She would repeatedly ask me, "Are you sure this is what you want?"

4:26

And to me, it was a no-brainer.

4:30

I didn't just want this; I needed it.

4:35

My grubby knees and crooked teeth were not on the list of requirements

4:40

for becoming a professional dancer.

4:43

And when I look back now,

4:45

both myself and my mother looked severely out of place.

4:49

But at the time, I was just too young and naive to feel inadequate.

4:55

I didn't care.

4:56

If Billy Elliot could do it, so could I.

4:59

Once my audition was done, I returned home for two weeks of staring out the window,

5:05

waiting for the postman,

5:06

waiting for my ticket out of my sleepy village

5:09

and into a world of jazz hands and dorm rooms.

5:14

It was good news followed by bad news:

5:19

I had got in, but the fees to attend a school like this were not cheap,

5:24

and despite my best efforts, I had not received any government funding.

5:30

I auditioned again the following year.

5:32

And this time, I received 40% funding,

5:35

but this was still just money that we didn't have,

5:38

and it broke my heart.

5:41

I was good enough.

5:43

I made the cut.

5:46

But I wasn't going anywhere.

5:51

It was a blessing in disguise,

5:53

although if anyone had said that to me back then,

5:55

I probably would've given them the finger and told them to jog on.

5:59

I wasn't willing to give up that easily.

Talent Show

6:02

So at age 11, I was bursting with excitement

6:06

when my dance teacher informed me of a talent show

6:10

which boasted opportunities of making you a star.

6:15

This was the second opportunity I was faced with.

6:20

I entered into singing, acting,

6:25

dancing and modeling.

6:28

The talent show consisted of workshops and seminars

6:32

with specialists who would help train you up for your performance

6:35

at the end of the week.

6:37

After meeting a woman called Louise Johnston

6:40

in an improvisation acting workshop,

6:42

she gave me the words "bowling ball,"

6:45

and asked me to create a short scene inspired by these words.

6:49

After making her laugh with a fictional story,

6:51

of how I threw a bowling ball at my brother and it bounced,

6:55

she asked me to join her acting agency.

6:59

I didn't really know what this meant.

7:01

I knew that I would do auditions for films and maybe become an actor,

7:07

but I still had big dreams of becoming a professional dancer,

7:11

so this woman was going to have to work a lot harder than that

7:14

if she was going to convince eleven-year-old me

7:16

that I was going to become an actress.

7:21

Was this going to take time away

7:23

from the 30 hours of dancing I was doing a week?

7:27

And what if I didn't get the part?

7:29

Was this going to be too upsetting?

7:31

And do actresses have teeth like mine?

7:33

Because if they do, I'm yet to watch any of their movies.

Game of Thrones

7:37

After meeting Louise in the February of 2009

7:41

and trying but failing to land the part

7:44

in the hit sequel "Nanny McPhee" to "The Big Bang,"

7:49

my second audition was for a show called "Game of Thrones."

7:54

This was the third opportunity or challenge I was presented with.

8:00

I climbed the steps to the Methodist Church

8:03

with my mother's hand in mine.

8:05

I perched my tiny bottom in one of the seats outside the audition room

8:09

and listened to an annoying girl with her even more annoying mother

8:13

tell me all about the number of auditions she had done prior to this one.

8:16

And also about her pet fish.

8:20

My name was called, then I stepped inside.

8:24

I had a hard Bristolian accent

8:26

and dark rings around my eyes that were so big they took up half my face

8:31

and a hole in the knee of my trousers which I tried to cover with my left hand

8:35

as I was talking to the kind lady who taped my audition.

8:39

But as soon as she pressed record,

8:42

it all drifted away.

8:45

Much like when I was dancing in my mother's living room,

8:48

I harnessed all of my insecurities and self-doubt

8:51

and let it flow through the words that came out of my mouth.

8:56

I was cheeky.

8:58

I was loud.

9:00

I was angry.

9:02

And for this, I was perfect.

9:07

After getting the part and shooting the pilot episode,

9:11

the show slowly grew

9:12

to become one of the biggest shows in television history.

9:17

To this day, we've smashed previous HBO viewing records.

9:22

We've been nominated for over 130 Emmys,

9:24

making us the most Emmy-nominated show to ever exist.

9:29

We've recently finished shooting our eighth and final season,

9:33

which is predicted to smash records that we've already broken.

9:36

And nearly a decade to the day since my first audition,

9:44

I'm still wondering,

9:46

when am I going to get to be Billy Elliot?

9:49

(Laughter)

9:51

I joke, but in all seriousness, I have absolutely no plans of slowing down.

9:57

Throughout my time in this industry, it has been a minefield.

10:00

I have grown from a child into an adult,

10:03

and from four feet tall into a whopping five feet tall.

10:07

(Laughter)

10:10

I have constantly been trying to say the right thing,

10:13

accidentally saying the wrong thing,

10:15

trying not to swear too much

10:17

and trying to stop saying "like, like" all of the time.

10:23

In February of 2017,

10:25

a friend of mine, Dom, and I were swigging beers in my kitchen,

10:28

and he confessed to me

10:29

that there is a huge problem with the creative industries.

10:33

I agreed.

10:34

The series of events that had got me to that point

10:37

were based mainly on luck and timing and were unable to be recreated.

10:41

He suggested to me that we create a social media,

10:44

but just for artists to be able to collaborate with one another

10:48

and create a career.

10:49

This was the fourth opportunity or challenge I was presented with.

10:54

"Great," I thought.

10:57

"How the hell do we do that?"

10:59

And daisie was born.

11:02

Of course, everyone who I spoke to about my latest endeavor thought that I was mad;

11:07

however, I know that this is something that I can help change.

11:11

This last year in the industry, we've seen a huge shift with the Me Too movement.

11:16

The industry is built with gatekeepers holding all of the power

11:19

and selecting who they deem talented enough to advance to the next level.

11:24

More often than not, it's easier to catch the attention of those people

11:27

if you have graduated from an expensive school.

11:30

But even then, I have so many friends who are fresh out of art school,

11:34

having trained for years and are still no closer to creating a career.

11:39

Now, I'm not claiming that with daisie I can make everybody a star,

11:42

but I do believe

11:44

that the key to success within creative industries is collaborating.

11:48

Actors are only as good as their writers.

11:51

Musicians are only as strong as their producers.

11:54

And designers need their teams.

11:58

To start the company, we self-funded.

Dom

12:02

I had a pot of cash from "Game of Thrones"

12:04

that I was free to invest wherever I liked.

12:07

Dom had a series of businesses from the age of 16,

12:10

which meant he was also left with a pot of cash.

12:13

We threw our money together 50-50, and we built a team.

12:17

Now, Lady Gaga has repeatedly said

12:21

that there could be a room of 100 people, and 99 don't believe in you,

12:27

but it just takes that one person to believe in you,

12:30

and they can change your life.

12:32

Well, now we have a team of six.

12:37

Over the next 16 months, we built our MVP.

12:40

Now, if you're wondering what an MVP is,

12:42

I only found out what it is about six months ago.

12:45

And from what I can gather, it's a product which proves as a problem worth solving

12:50

with the minimum team effort.

12:53

So basically from my point of view, you're marketing something

12:56

which you know is going to be good one day,

12:59

but is a little bit bad right now.

13:01

And for us, that was an iOS app.

13:04

The six of us made an office in Dom's garden,

13:07

and on August 1, 2018, we released our version one.

13:12

We had over 30,000 downloads in the first 24 hours

13:17

and over 30,000 comments

13:19

asking when the Android version was going to be coming.

13:23

Despite our app being imperfect, buggy and literally built by one man alone,

13:28

this was exactly what we needed for people to invest.

13:31

We learned a lot from our angry users and our scary investors.

13:36

And over the last six months, we have grown our team to 16 people.

Who you know

13:42

From then till now, we've been building version two,

13:45

which we will be launching in April.

13:47

Within the industry,

13:48

there is a common phrase which I think we're all pretty familiar with.

13:52

And that is, "It's not what you know, it's who you know."

13:55

And with daisie, I hope to give that power back to the creator.

13:59

I want to encourage people to create a list of contacts

14:02

that they will work with and support as they take their first steps

14:05

into the fickle and often challenging creative world.

14:10

I am of the generation who grew up with the Internet.

14:13

I've never known anything else.

14:15

We are connected, we are aware, and we are the future.

14:21

I hope daisie can breathe new life

14:23

into the slightly dystopian, ad-riddled hellscapes

14:26

that social media platforms have become.

14:29

I hope to create a space where people can boast their art and creativity

14:33

rather than what car they are driving

14:35

and whether or not they bought it in cash or on finance.

14:38

In a world where literally anyone can be famous,

14:42

I hope to inspire people to be talented instead.

Conclusion

14:46

Talent will carry you so much further than your 15 minutes of fame.

14:52

So why am I telling you all this?

14:56

The very fact that I'm here giving a TEDx talk right now

14:59

is so far from anything I thought that I was capable of.

15:03

Even writing the bio for my speech made me realize

15:06

that in a decade, everything in my life has changed.

15:11

I am an Emmy-nominated actress, an entrepreneur and an activist;

15:16

yet I have no formal qualifications to my name.

15:22

When I left school about seven years ago, I made it my mission to continue learning

15:27

even though I never wanted to set foot in a classroom again.

15:30

Who knows what's going to happen to my life in the next 10 years?

15:34

I surely have no idea.

15:36

I've never had an end goal.

15:38

It's working out okay so far.

15:41

So trust that you're good enough.

15:45

If there's one thing that I've learned is that there truly is a place for everyone.

15:51

Ask questions,

15:52

and laugh in the face of people who say that they're stupid questions.

15:57

Be open to learning and admitting

15:59

when you don't know what the hell is going on.

16:03

Refuse to hold yourself back,

16:06

and dare to dream big.

16:08

Thank you for listening.

16:10

(Applause)