

Michael Cowen:

This is Michael Cowen, and welcome to Trial Lawyer Nation.

Speaker 2:

You are the leader in the courtroom, and you want the jury to be looking to you for the answers.

Speaker 3:

When you figure out your theory, never deviate.

Speaker 4:

You want the facts to be consistent, complete, and credible.

Speaker 5:

The defense has no problem running out the clock. Delay is the friend of the defense.

Speaker 6:

It's tough to grow from, by trying to hold on and micromanage.

Speaker 7:

You've got to front load a simple structure for jurors to be able to hold onto.

Speaker 8:

What types of creative things can we do as lawyers, even though we don't have a trial setting?

Speaker 9:

Whatever you got to do to make it real, you've got to do to make it real. But the person who needs convincing is you.

Voiceover:

Welcome to the award-winning podcast, Trial Lawyer Nation. Your source to win bigger verdicts, get more cases and manage your law firm. And now here's your host, noteworthy author, sought after speaker and renowned trial lawyer, Michael Cowen.

Michael Cowen:

Today on Trial Lawyer Nation, I have my favorite client of all time. I know my other clients are going to get mad at me, but it's the truth. Krystal Cantu, how are you doing today Krystal?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I'm doing good, thank you. It's good to see you again.

Michael Cowen:

It's good to see you too. It's been a while. Before I get into the meat of this, I want to say thank you to LawPods. You might notice our audio quality has gone up in this podcast. That's because I just started

working with a company called LawPods. They are producing the podcast for me. They're doing the edits. They're posting it everywhere. It has been such a joy to just be able to just sit there, to record, have someone get it, and get it perfect, and do all the work for me. If any of our listeners are thinking about doing their own podcast, which I think is a good idea, highly recommend LawPods. So Krystal, how are you doing today?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I'm doing good. I'm doing good.

Michael Cowen:

Good. So I represented you a number of years in a case. And can you just tell us a little bit about what happened?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Yes. So in 2013 I was in a car accident. No fault of anybody's. It was one of my tires that popped on our way home. Would you say it was a highway? I don't really remember. Was it a-

Michael Cowen:

It was a highway.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

It was a highway. Okay, so it was on the highway driving back home from San Antonio and our car started rolling. And in that process, my arm got completely ruined and had to be amputated because of that. And then that's where I was introduced to you.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. And you say to the fault of your own, and that tires should not have come apart, and it was a Chinese made tire sold with an English sounding name, so it didn't appear to be Chinese and it didn't have the safety features that said it had on it, and it wasn't made right. And that's what happened and why we had a good case.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Right. Which I would've never known. I had no clue. I just thought my tire popped out of nowhere.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Well how would you know? And all the stuff that was wrong with it was on the inside. When you buy the tire, it looks just fine. You don't know that they don't put what they call the nylon cap ply that's supposed to keep it together like it says it has. And of course you probably didn't even know what a nylon cap ply was when y'all bought the tire or that it had manufacturing defects that are buried within the rubber and you can't see them.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I will say now though, that I'm very anal about my tires. The best of the best tires, I always have to have the little option when I'm driving to see the tire pressure, constantly looking at the tire pressure. I'm very anal about my tires now. So maybe it's a good thing because before I didn't really care, I didn't really look

into the quality of tires, and now I make sure I have the best of the best because I know how important they are.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. But I mean the tires you all bought were perfectly...

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

They were supposed to be brand new.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. They were brand new, they just weren't made right, but you didn't know that. I mean, you went to a tire store, you bought tires that said they met all the regulations. They actually said they had a nylon cap ply on, they just didn't. And they ended up getting recalled as a result of your case if you remember right.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I don't. I didn't remember that.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah, no, we got it. We got them recalled. And then we actually made them expand the recall beyond the... Actually they recalled the tire and then we found out in discovery, the company that made your tire, they sold the capital brand, which is the brand you had. But they had a Hercules brand, which the same factory, same problems, but they only recalled the capital. And so we actually went and petitioned, the government made him recall the Hercules.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

That's amazing. Wow.

Michael Cowen:

That's one of the things I'm actually proudest of in my legal career that we... It's unfortunately what you went through, but we were at least able to take what we learned in your case and then keep it from happening to someone else by forcing the recall.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Exactly, exactly. That's amazing.

Michael Cowen:

And so I want to just ask you, it didn't go to trial, but it we did go through the litigation process. We did lots of depositions, including your deposition. I went through tons of documents that I had to get translated from Chinese and everything else, and it was a process. It was a long process.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

It was.

Michael Cowen:

Mediations, not selling at mediation, continuing to negotiate. What was that like from your perspective as the client?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I believe it was a deposition where they had Daniel and I in the same room.

Michael Cowen:

And Daniel was your boyfriend at the time, your husband now, who was also the driver that we also sued in the case because it kept us... Well, one because we knew they were going to blame him and he had insurance, but also it kept us in state court.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

My now husband and father to my son. I remember that they had us both in the deposition room, they took mine and then they took his and I just remember them being very cruel in how they questioned things. How did I not check my tires? Did I not care about myself? How did Daniel not check the tires? Do you not care about Krystal? And I was just like, wow, what is going on here? I remember that very vividly. So, that was rough.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I remember I picked up my phone and played a game and it probably didn't very look good on my end, but I needed to zone out of it somehow, because it was just too much going on and I needed to find a way to shut my mouth before I got myself in trouble. So I remember that.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And I remember being in the sitting room, I think this is when everything was closing and you guys were just going back and forth, back and forth, back and forth. It was a long day. It was just a long process that I wasn't... I know I wasn't ready for at the time. I'm glad I did it, but I wasn't ready for it at the time. It was a lot thrown on me at once, but I'm figuring it out now. I'm getting there now. I'm healing from it now. But I think then it was just a lot thrown at me and it was a lot of people having me remember things that I didn't necessarily want to remember at the time.

Michael Cowen:

One thing that's always seemed to me, like it would be tough is a lot of the value of the case. I mean, figuring out whether you had a good case, what the case might be worth, documents in Chinese you hadn't read, my experience doing tire cases. You don't know about how a tire's supposed to be made. I can show you a picture of an x-ray of attire and doesn't mean anything to you. How tough is it to try to make important... One how to judge, whether we're even doing a good job or not. And then two to make important decisions about whether to accept a settlement or not when you've got, it's almost... This one really was in a foreign language, it was in Chinese, but plus the legalese. What was that like?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I mean, I remember I first met you, you came to my apartment, not too long after I got out of the hospital. You came to my apartment, you met with me, my mom, my dad, Daniel. I had no clue what was going on. My mom surprised me with you. So I had no idea what we were even doing there or what you

were doing there. And as I got to know you made me feel so comfortable and I just trusted you and whatever you were doing, I trusted that you had good intentions. You were going to do good by me. You weren't going to do any wrong by me. And my family knew you very well.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

So I just trusted you because you're the expert in what you do. You told me just to keep doing what I'm doing, don't change anything I'm doing, which I loved. Because at that time I was taking on CrossFit as a form of therapy. So I said, okay, he's not going to stop me from doing anything I'm doing. I just kind of have to sit back and relax and trust him, and that's exactly what I did. And I trusted you because you're the expert.

Michael Cowen:

And I appreciate that. Is there anything I did that you think helped me or in that trust?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I don't know. I remember you coming to the apartment. I don't know what you said or what you did, but I always go off of first impressions. So whatever it is that you said, or you did it left a good impression on me because if I don't have an immediate good first impression on you, if I don't feel trusted with you, calm, peaceful, good vibes. That kind of sticks with me. So you have a pretty good impression on me.

Michael Cowen:

Okay. And to be clear to my listeners, I didn't just code call, knock on the door and solicit your case. Your mom had asked me to go over, and I didn't know that you weren't expecting me either. Your mom did ask us to go there, and actually your mom knew another lawyer who asked me to get involved, is how that all worked out.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

My mom was the one involved in all this and then I was just kind of thrown into it, but that's okay. My mom was being my mom.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Well she loves you. And she was really worried. But I remember you were doing a lot of public stuff at the time you were doing CrossFit, you were on Inside Edition, and I forgot what other national TV show you were.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

A lot of them.

Michael Cowen:

Doing the CrossFit games. You were lifting more with your left arm than you could with both arms before you got hurt. I mean very inspirational, but I remember a lot of other lawyers were telling your mom, and I think they're an ulterior motive. I think they wanted to get you to fire me and hire them. But they were telling your mom, because your mom worked at the courthouse, that Michael's letting Krystal mess up the case, she's on there saying I can do anything, I don't have any limits. And so she'd call me all

worried. I'm like, "No, let Krystal be Krystal." And actually the defense was so scared of you because of who you were and how powerful you were.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Really?

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. We actually did a focus group early on in your case. And some of the things were so mean, I never showed you all the video, but before we did our first deposition we hired some people in the county where the case was and we went through some basic case facts. And they all thought you had a good case, but they're all like, "People can work with one arm. I bet you she's just trying to milk this. She's not doing anything." And they all had a number, and it was probably about a million dollars, what they thought your case was worth. And then we showed them the video that Rackspace made of you.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Oh, I remember that video.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. Doing all the work at the... If people just go on YouTube, it's still, there. It goes Google, Krystal, K-R-Y-S-T-A-L Strong. And it's all the work you're doing, trying to get better. The numbers skyrocketed after they watched that video, like oh my gosh, she's so special. We want to help her. The defense lawyer was in love with you. On one hand, because you were so inspirational. It scared them because most people, when they get hurt, they think their role is to talk about how hard everything is, and woe is me. Now you were the opposite. At the time you were like, there's nothing I can't do, that this doesn't really affect me.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I was superwoman in my mind back then. You could not touch me. I was made of steel. I was not human. It was just this persona that I created and I lived in, and you literally could not touch that person. You couldn't.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. So what drove that?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

So I mean a lot of healing in the past year. I've done a lot of backtracking and figuring things out, why I did things the way I did back then, how I did things and through a lot of therapy and through a lot of hypnosis that I did, I realized that very early on when I was still in the hospital. So I don't know if you remember. I was only there for three days. I was only there for three days and I was only kept an extra day because I had a slight fever on day two. So they kept me one extra... If not, I would've been gone on the second day. And I remember, I'm pretty sure it was day two. All my family that was from the Rio Grande Valley. Good chunk of them, drove up to San Antonio and they were all sitting in the waiting room.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

They hadn't seen me yet. They had me walk to the waiting room to go see them. And everybody was crying. Everybody. They knew I was okay. They knew I was fine, but they just started thinking ahead, which why wouldn't they? They're just worried. So I'm sure they started thinking about how hard life was going to be for me, that I was going to get treated differently. So just seeing them cry. And these are all people that I look up to, continue to look up to. These are the people that molded me to be who I am today, to see them crying and feel sorry for me, made me want to be the complete opposite of what they were thinking was going to happen.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I needed to find a way to not make that happen. I needed to be strong for them. I needed to do great things. I needed just to live a life to where no one was going to belittle me, and there was not going to be any hardships for me. And I think it was that single little moment that it just clicked. And I started immediately that day, creating that persona, from that day because I did not want any of those people to think differently of me.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. And it's really a mixed bag because on one hand, one of the reasons I have so much love and admiration for you is your tenacity. I mean, you didn't just sit back and say woe was me, I can't ever do anything. But on the other hand, and I don't know if you remember us talking about it, but I could tell that you were in denial and that there's something deeper down that you were repressing. And I think what I told you... And remember, I don't know if you remember the conversations, after we did like a big witness prep where I brought in a woman named Pat Montes to try to work with you. And we finally got a little chin in the armor by the end of the day. It took a long time.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Can I tell you something about that though?

Michael Cowen:

Yeah.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

That was fake.

Michael Cowen:

Oh really?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

That was fake.

Michael Cowen:

Wow.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I made myself do that because I knew it was what she wanted. The only real moment of emotion and tears that came from me was when I was talking about Laura, the woman that I used to nanny for and I

was saying that she got cancer and I was very emotional about it. That was real. Everything else was forced because I knew that's what she wanted out of me.

Michael Cowen:

Wow. Yikes.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I was not ready to close my eyes and go back. That's why I was laughing. And she was like, "Stop laughing. Why are you laughing?" I didn't know this at the time. I didn't know mentally that I wasn't ready. To me I was just like, this is laughable. This is not for me. I'm strong. You don't know me. I don't need to cry over this, but really what was going on, I was not mentally ready to go back there. So my mind was kind of pushing through that persona, so that I didn't have to deal with it because at that time I just wasn't ready.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. And we actually weren't trying to get you to cry. We're just trying to get you to get real on that you had some limitations, because you were telling us there was absolutely zero affect it had in your life, and that's frankly-

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

That's absolutely what I believed back then. That is absolutely what I believed.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. And what I remember telling you is you weren't my hero because it was easy. You didn't have an effect. You're my hero because you strove and overcame things that were really hard. So I'm going to look back. So, you went and did all these incredible things. I said you were on national TV, you were constantly in the media, both social media and regular mainstream media. You were doing the CrossFit games, all this stuff. How much do you think that was healthy and how much do you think that was trying to escape the reality of what you're going through?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Now that I look at it... It's funny, you know what I thought about right now too? You actually had me see a doctor, not a mental doc, a physical doctor, to go get physical done. And he told me, "You need to stop what you're doing, you should not be doing CrossFit, you should not be doing this." And I don't know if I ever told you this.

Michael Cowen:

You were pissed.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

But I was pissed. I was livid. I was seeing red. I was just like, how dare this guy tell me that I can't do this, do that. And he was just like, you don't understand what you're doing to your body. Obviously I've learned now what I was doing to my body. But at that time I just couldn't fathom someone telling me you can't do this. I will never regret what I did. I can never regret anything that happened or how I did it

because it has all led me to where I am today. I would never go back and change anything. I would keep everything as is. I would. No matter how difficult it was I would keep it all just the same.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I'm glad I took CrossFit because it kept me from going other ways. So I'm glad I had that with me. I could have easily gotten depressed because I felt like I had no support group. I could have felt like I had nothing to do because I was not good at my job anymore. I wasn't. It was you that might have told me, I told you either you or someone, "I don't want to do this work anymore. I want to go be a CrossFit athlete." And I want to say it was you, you're like, "Do you think that because you're not good at your job anymore?" I don't remember if it was you or something.

Michael Cowen:

It was me.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

It was you okay? You're like, "Do you think it's because you're not good at it." I was like, "No, it's because I want to be a CrossFit athlete." And you're like, okay, but do you think it's... And it was no, I wasn't any good at my job anymore. I could not multitask. My job consisted of having to chat with multiple people online while taking a phone call while writing things down. And the truth of the matter. I couldn't do that well anymore.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I was not meeting my goals for the month, nothing. And so that hurt, but I was never going to show that to anybody. So I could have taken various different routes, but I'm glad I took that route because I kept my body healthy. I kept my mind preoccupied, but in a healthy way. So I'm glad I chose the route that I did because I could have gone any other route and maybe had a very different outcome.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. And compared to deep depression, drugs, alcohol, all the other things that other people turned to, it was not the most unhealthy choice you could make. And look, it's suck what happened to you. And I don't think anyone has the right to tell you how to grieve or tell you how to deal with something that was just thrust on you through no fault on your own. I think you have every right to deal with it in your way. And that was one of the things that I really tried to respect in our attorney-client relationship, was I'm working for you and you're the one that is going through this, you're the one that needs to pick how you do it.

Michael Cowen:

Now, I do have to advise you out against testifying that there's nothing wrong with you and there's no limitations. But I also had to know that we're going to have to tell most of the story, the limitations from other people. People other than you. We're going to have to find other people around you. I think Mallory tells the story, you all were out to dinner and you Daniel, I think Mallory was there too. And you had ordered a steak and then he-

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And he cut my steak.

Michael Cowen:

He took it, he cut and put it... nothing was said, like it came to you, he just grabbed the plate, cut it real quick, put it back, like nothing happened. And she's like, really? There's nothing? This doesn't affect you at all. And what if you didn't have Daniel? What if... Luckily y'all are still together, but y'all were young. You don't know whether your boyfriend at that point's going to be with you for the rest of your life.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Those are things that I struggled with behind closed doors. If it was one thing that I struggled with the most, it was what was happening between Daniel and I behind closed doors because I had lost a lot of confidence in myself. I had lost a lot of confidence in who I was, in being a woman. So I was very, very scared. It brought me a ton of anxiety thinking that I wasn't good enough and that he was just going to up and leave, a ton of anxiety that I never mentioned to anyone. But that was all happening behind closed doors. You would've never thought that.

Michael Cowen:

Do you think there's anything I could have done to try to get enough of a trust or enough a relationship? And I don't even know if you were ready to open up to yourself yet, but I mean, where we could have ever shared that with each other back then, when not when the case was still going on and I was still representing you because I intuitively guessed about 80% of this, not a hundred percent. Definitely not the fake emotion when we did the psychodrama, and definitely I didn't necessarily the lack of confidence as a woman. And those two things I did not guess, but a lot of it I did, but is there anything you think I could have done differently, that could have helped you feel comfortable enough to admit it to yourself or to me?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I don't think so. I don't think I was. I mean, I was what? 22, 23, if I'm not mistaken. Somewhere around there, but even at that age, I don't think my mind was mature enough to ever get there. Not to where I am now. I just was not mature enough. I didn't have the tools that I'd gotten through therapy. I didn't have the knowledge. I didn't know how to do any of that processing. I didn't know how to do any of that. So to me, I was living such an incredible life and I was doing so well. But when I look back at it now, I see how horribly I was doing. In my eyes, I was doing great. And now that I see it, I was like, no, you were really hurting. And you were really struggling. You made it your normal to struggle and to feel pain, which is what I did.

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. And everybody admired you for it, but no one knew what all you were going through.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

No.

Michael Cowen:

So what is it that finally calls the dam to break, that finally let you break through and get real with what you were going through.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

So last year... I've always experienced anxiety, but I always felt it through physical symptoms. My heart would be pounding really fast. I would get sweaty clammy hands. My stomach would hurt a lot of physical symptoms, nothing mental. Racing thoughts, suicidal thought, nothing like that. I never experienced anything like that. I made these physical symptoms my normal, oh, I'm just feeling anxious. I'm just feeling nervous. I'll just get through it. I'll get through it. Last year, what I now know to be, and I'm losing it now. I can't even think about it. I was basically, I started experiencing, here we go, depersonalization.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

What I was experiencing was physically I was here, but I felt like I was in another dimension is the best way I can describe it. As if things weren't real and I couldn't grab them. It was the scariest thing that I could have ever experienced because I didn't know what it was. I didn't know what was happening. I immediately thought I'm going crazy. And from that thought, I said, I'm going crazy. Crazy people get put in mental hospitals. This is just how my mind was working at the time. I'm going crazy. Crazy people go to mental hospitals.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

People that can't get through it, kill themselves. And that's exactly how my mind went. And within a matter of weeks... I also saw a therapist that was really horrible for me. And I got away from her, thank God. But the minute that therapist, it was on the second day that I saw her, I tried to tell her what I was experiencing. And she immediately told me, "We need to put you on medicine." And I was like, whoa, this is my second day seeing you, I've never been on medication for anxiety. And my mind started thinking that means you're crazy, that means you can't handle this. That means you're going to kill yourself.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And so I just started spiraling out of control. It went from here to here in a matter of five days. I didn't sleep because I couldn't. I was full of adrenaline because I was so scared. I had already convinced myself that I was going to kill myself. I thought that I was going to have this impulse to just do it. I was so scared that I didn't sleep, I wasn't eating, I was the smallest I've ever been. I was weighing like 130 pounds, typically I weigh 150, 160 and I'm 5'8". You could see my bones. I was not eating because I couldn't, I was not sleeping because I couldn't. And then the suicidal thoughts went out of the roof. I started seeing guns at Daniel's head. I started seeing guns at my son's head.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And I was like, what is happening right now? I just could not understand why these things were happening to me. And I went to the hospital three times. The first time I said, "No, I've got it. I'm going to leave." Second time, I simply wanted sleep medication. I said, "If I sleep, I'll get better." And they said, "No, you need to see a psychiatrist." Nope, that means I'm crazy. I don't want to do it. Second time, "No, I'll go home. I'll do it by myself." After a week and a half of not sleeping, I went to go get the needles. What is the needles called? Those little thin needles.

Michael Cowen:

Acupuncture?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Acupuncture. I went to go get acupuncture because someone told me that it de-stresses you. I went to go and they put me in a room by myself, and I just started spiraling out of control. I got out of there. It was a three story building. When I left my mind was telling me to jump, jump, jump. And so it was like, I was fighting with these thoughts that I was having. And I screamed at the top of my lungs. I said, "No, I'm not going to jump. I'm not going to jump." And I literally crawled down the stairs because I was so scared that I was just going to jump. And I told Daniel, "Take me to the hospital." And he goes, "What are we going to do this time? You keep leaving."

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I said, "I'm not going to leave. I'm not going to leave. I'm done." I said, "I'm done with this. I said, I'm going to get help." And I went in there and the nurses knew exactly who I was. And they're like, "We don't want to be rude, but you're not leaving this time. You're not leaving." And I said, "I don't want to leave." And I said, "Give me any medication you want to give me. I said, I'm ready." No matter how scared I was. I thought... Medication to me was a weakness. If I had to take medication, that means I was weak, that means I couldn't do it by myself. When I had lost an arm and I did it by myself, I didn't need any medication.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

So why did I have to do this on medication? I threw it all out the door, and I said, just get the help because you can't live like this. You can't be a mom like this. You can't be a wife like this and I didn't feel like myself. I didn't, I really didn't. I wasn't sleeping. I wasn't eating. I started the medication, which was very strong medication. I felt like a zombie, but I kept telling myself to push through, push through the medication. They even told me, they said, "This is probably going to take weeks because you've waited so long." And she even said, "If you don't start sleeping, we need to put you on psychotic medicine so that your mind can just shut up." And I was like, oh my God, what did I do?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And eventually, I got advice from someone else to just push through and don't take the antipsychotics, and I did. I went to go see another psychiatrist. He prescribed me a third medication, which also freaked me out. But after talking to him, I'm so grateful for him. He's such an incredible doctor down here in south Florida. And he looked me with his bright blue eyes. He looked me dead in the eyes after talking with me for an hour. And he goes, "You're not going to kill yourself." He's like, "Trust who you are. You know who you are. Trust yourself." He said, "You are scared. You are terrified right now. This is that's what's happening to you." He's like, "You're not going crazy." He's like, "You're okay. You're just scared."

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And I was just like, "I don't feel like that. I really don't feel like that." I was like, "I think something's really wrong." He's like, "Trust me." He's like, "Nothing's wrong. You're scared. You haven't slept. You haven't ate." He's like "Stop thinking you're going to kill yourself." And I was just like, okay, so a third medication? He's like, "Yeah a third one. And just trust me. He's like, if you would've come to me in the first place, I wouldn't have put you on one of those." He's like, "But just trust me." I said, "At this point, I have no reason not to trust anybody that's willing to help me."

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

So that was the medication that really turned everything around for me, the one that he put me on. And I was already doing therapy once a week. I was doing hypnosis. I started journaling. I started listening to

podcasts on anxiety, getting to really know what causes anxiety, how it can portray itself and manifest itself physically, mentally. So, that really helped me get to know what was happening to my body. So I wouldn't be scared of what was going on anymore. I knew exactly why my body and my mind were doing these things.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And then there was a day that I was listening to the podcast... I was taking the medication, I still hadn't been sleeping completely yet, maybe an hour a night is what I was getting the most. And I was going on the walk. And this guy that I was listening to the podcast is called The Anxiety Guy podcast. I still listen to it. It's great. He said, "If after all this work that you've done, if you're not experiencing any relief. It's because you don't want to change." And I was like, what does he mean? I was like, I'm taking the medicine. I'm doing all these things. I'm doing everything I have to change.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And I was like, what does he mean? And I sat on the front porch and I stayed out there for hours. And I said, what does he mean? I was like, of course I want to change. I don't want to feel like this. And then everything just hit me like a ton of bricks. And I was like, okay, I get it. I was like, I have to change me. I have to change the Krystal that I created. And I started coming to those realizations that I created this persona that was not me. It was not the real me, and I had to let her go. And I did not want to let her go.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I didn't. I didn't. I held onto her at the hospital three times before I said, yes. I did not want to let her go, and I had to. And it was a lot of ego that I had to let go, but I just eventually came to the realization that popularity, social media followers, commercials, TV networks, I will throw that all away like this, just to have mental health and be clear minded, and live free from these anxiety symptoms. I would throw it all away, and I have, because I'm more important than the popularity than the commercials than all of this. I'm more important than that.

Michael Cowen:

You are.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And it took a lot for me to get there.

Michael Cowen:

I wish to give you a hug. I'm in Texas and you're in Florida.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Yeah, it was a hard year. It was a hard year. But I'm really proud of myself because this was way harder than losing an arm. I've told my therapist that when I was probably a week not into sleeping, I said, "If you could take my other arm and I was left without two arms, and you could heal me, please do it right now." And he was like, "We don't got to do that Krystal. We're going to get there. You just got to give this time." And I was like, "I don't feel like I have time right now." I was like, "I'm so scared. I feel like I'm going to kill my... I don't know what's going to happen," but I really just needed time to figure out what needed

to change, to figure out what I needed to do, and to figure out how to heal from all the trauma that I never considered trauma. It took me a long time, but I got there finally.

Michael Cowen:

Thank God. I'm glad you did.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Yeah. Yep.

Michael Cowen:

I've been in therapy for years, myself. I don't think I was when I met you. I think I tried somebody and I wasn't... The first person I found was the wrong person and then-

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Just like me. Yeah.

Michael Cowen:

And then I had to find it. And then I had to... I don't know. I had to get real enough, brave enough, I don't know, to talk about-

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

You have to be courageous.

Michael Cowen:

To be honest enough fully, and to trust the therapist enough to be fully honest about things and probably spun my wheels for a good year or two, honestly, before I was even able to see what the real work was I needed to do. I wonder what we could do to make it not so tough for people to do that. Do you have any idea?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

As far as therapy?

Michael Cowen:

Yeah. I mean, and getting real and being... I think it's getting worse and one hand, there's less of a stigma of therapy. I'm used to be... I talked to my in-laws like, well, if you go to therapy is because you're crazy. And they can use it big time or they're not going to do it. And they think I'm just horrible because I go on a podcast and say that I go to therapy, because I don't think there's anything wrong with it. It's helped me a lot. But they don't understand that at all. And so there used to be a stigma. I think the stigma's pretty much gone, but there's still this... And I think social media's made it so worse. We all have this pressure to create this persona that we have all this everything's perfect. We have this perfect life where these perfect people create this image, all these filters on top of, I mean... I wonder if there's anything we could do as a society to break through that.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

As a society we're doing really well in changing that stigma, because if you look at the way that my mind started working last year with someone trying to say that I needed medication. My mind was working around the stigma that everybody has put on mental health these years. Medication means you're crazy. Crazy people commit suicide. That's just how we, as a society made it look like, and there was not enough knowledge out there. Nobody talked about it. Everybody always feels like what they deal with. They're the only ones dealing with it. And if they only talked about it more openly, they would understand that there are millions of other people that are experiencing the same.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I thought I was the only person that was experiencing these. It took me Michael, four, five months. My therapist tells me all the time about it, when he tells me how proud he is. He's like, "Do you know how long it took you to admit that you were having a suicidal thought?" And I was like, "Yeah, I remember." He's like, you didn't even want... He said, I'm scared of holding a knife or I'm scared of the guns. He's like, but you never wanted to say the word suicide. He's like, you thought that if you said it was going to make it real.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

He's like, and now you just say it so openly, you say it without fear. He's like you took the fear away from that word. You just made yourself stronger by saying it. And I was so scared to say it before. I didn't want to tell Daniel. I had a very hard time telling my mom. I had my mom come up here or over here, not up here... Come over here to help me with walking while I was going to get put on medication because I didn't know what this medication was going to do to me. And I didn't know how to tell my mom because Hispanics don't talk about this. They don't talk about mental health. They don't talk about anything like that.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And so I didn't know how to explain to my mom that I was having thoughts about killing myself. And I was like, what am I going to tell her? But I also didn't want to lie to her. She never really fully comprehended what I was going through. Every time she would talk to my aunts on the phone, she'd just be like, Krystal's sick, Krystal's sick. And I stopped her one day and I said, "Mom, I'm not sick. I'm experiencing a lot of anxiety." I said, "I'm scared." And she was like, "Well, what are you scared of?" And it took a lot for me to say it, but I was like, "I'm scared I'm going to kill myself, mom."

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And she was like, "what do you mean?" And I just had to tell her that I was really scared. I was going to kill myself. And it took a lot of courage for me to say, and it takes courage for me to say it right now because it's a scary thing to talk about. Nobody wants to say that nobody wants to admit that. But I think if people realize that there's a difference between having an intrusive thought and actually going through with the thought. They're very different.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

A lot of people, I've come to learn, have suicidal thoughts, very intrusive thoughts. And it's a matter of how we work through them, how we get through them, how we can think about them differently and realize where they're coming from. But I didn't know that back then, I almost thought that initial thought was a premonition to what was going to happen. And that's what led me into that deep dark hole that I swear to God, I never want to go back into.

Michael Cowen:

No. I was shocked. I'm trying to remember who it was. It was on a podcast. It was Dr. Zubin Damani, I had a psychologist on and she was talking about suicide and shootings and stuff, and school shootings and all these awful things happening. And I was shocked to know that suicidal thoughts are actually incredibly common, 80% or 90% of people have them. It's more abnormal not to have them than to have them, which on one side was a little scary to hear. On the other hand, it was a little liberating that, no, I'm not alone, but it's just part of life, but no one admits it. And so it really does stigmatize us.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Yeah. And it makes you feel like you're so alone in it. And it took me months to admit it. I didn't even say it to the doctors at the hospital. They ask you, if you go to the hospital and you go in for anxiety or depression, they're going to ask you, are you having suicidal thoughts? Each time that I went to the hospital. No, no, no, no, no. I did not want to tell them because I thought that they were going to lock me up in a mental hospital. So I said, no, nope, no, no. I trusted my psychiatrist and I trusted my now therapist, but I did not trust them. And so I said no.

Michael Cowen:

And the fact is, they're not very well equipped in the yard to handle these things anyway. I mean, they're not. They don't have the resources. They're not really that trained. They're we have a long ways to go.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

We do. But I think just talking about it and this is why I started doing speaking events on mental health, for anything, for any type of workplace, any type of environment, I will talk about what happened and I will talk about it openly and vividly. And some people might think it's too much, some people might think it's triggering, but I think people need to hear it, so that they know that they're not alone and that things can change. They can. So the more we talk about it vividly and openly, the better it's going to get.

Michael Cowen:

But you're continuing to be amazing Krystal.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Thank you.

Michael Cowen:

You were amazing physically, although maybe it wasn't all that healthy, but it was incredible. And look of all the possible outlets you could have had, physical fitness was not the worst one to have. And now you're amazingly vulnerable and real, and I am so lucky to have crossed paths with you and have you in my life. I just want you to know that, you are an incredible least special person and it was worth going to law school to meet you. I'll put it that way. I don't wish anybody to go through what you went through, but I wish one of my clients... I mean, I love everybody, but you love people in different ways. And I mean, it's a blessing to represent every person I get to represent, but you are always going to be one of the special ones.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Thank you. I appreciate that.

Voiceover:

Each year, the law firm of Cowen Rodriguez Peacock pays millions of dollars in co-counsel fees to attorneys nationwide on trucking and commercial vehicle cases. If you have an injury case involving death or catastrophic injuries and would like to partner with our firm, please contact us by calling 210 941 1301, to discuss the case in detail and see where we can add value in a partnership. And now back to the show.

Michael Cowen:

So how are you doing today?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I'm doing a lot better. I'm doing a lot better. I'm very sensitive to my emotions, to my feelings now. I talk a lot about what I'm feeling to Daniel, about what I'm experiencing. I learned from day one, not to stay quiet. So I don't anymore. If I'm feeling pain, if I'm experiencing something I say it. Whether it's to Daniel, whether it's to my therapist, I say it, and I don't hold it in anymore, which is what I did before. And even though I'm more aware of everything that goes on and that might make it a little harder for me some days. I tell myself that it's very uncomfortable right now.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I try to change my words too. I try to stay away from harder and tell myself it's not harder. It's just uncomfortable because I've never had to do this before. I've never had to openly speak. I've never had to be courageous. I've never had to be brave about what I'm feeling about what I'm thinking. And because I haven't done it in 32 years, it's new to me. It's very fresh to me. I'm not used to it. So there are days when it's going to be extremely uncomfortable, but that's okay. And I have PTSD from what happened last year.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

A lot of what happened, happened in this house. And so there are times when I don't even want to come back here because I just experienced so much pain here. So it's taken me a while to... I have to talk to my house sometimes. I have to touch the walls and be like, no, I love you. You're good to me. You're a safe space. And even though what happened in here was painful. It's okay. I had to go through that whole process with this entire living space. And I have moments where I can just look at a wall and immediately go back to where I was last year, and it takes time. A few minutes, sometimes a couple hours sometimes.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

But I have to remind myself that it is okay to remember what happened. But I also have to remember that I don't have to be living in that moment again. It's okay for me to remember. It's okay for me to experience and feel what happened last year, but I don't have to live there anymore. I'm much further from where I was. Even in the moment it may not feel like that, but I always remind myself of that. You will never be where you were last year because you've grown so much, because you've learned so much. So you can experience it, but you're not living it anymore. So I try to remind myself every day. Some days are good, some days are not so good, but that's life. You have to work at it every day.

Michael Cowen:

How's Daniel dealing with going from being married to superwoman who had no problems ever, to having being married to a real human being who's going to admit and talk about everything that's going on?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Daniel was very much like you. He knew what I was doing and how I was doing it, but he never brought it to my attention, ever. He also believed that I needed to come to terms with it in my own way, because he knew that nothing he would say or do would change it. I had to change it myself. And so last year, I don't know where I'd be without him because Daniel was the one that when I was so stuck in fear and I could not move or touch anything, because I was so scared that I was going to kill myself. He would just come and hug me and say, "Remember who you are, just remember who you are. Don't forget." He's like, "No matter what's happening in your head right now, don't forget. Don't forget who you are. Don't forget who you are." Because there were times when I didn't know who I was anymore.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

He said, "Just trust yourself, trust yourself." And I needed him there because there were times where I did not trust myself. There were times where I didn't remember who I was or what I had gone through and I needed to hear those words. So I think Daniel has always known it. And I just see him as more of a superhuman than I will ever be, for him being able to do the things that he does while experiencing someone that he loves go through this because if it were vice versa, I don't know what the hell I would do if it were him going through that.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I don't think I could handle it the way that he handled it or for him to be up all hours of the night just because I was scared not to fall asleep or I was scared because I wasn't falling asleep. He likes that I am more expressive now and I don't cut him off or just stay silent anymore. So I think he very much enjoys it. But he's also more aware now that there are going to be a lot more times where I say, I need to be alone. You can take Joaquin, our son, and I need a moment. And he's fully aware of that now. So I think he transitioned just fine.

Michael Cowen:

The obvious love he had for you was one of the other things that has stayed with me from the case. A lot of cases, I'll be honest with you, I've handled over a thousand cases. So a lot of them do blend together, but you remember specific moments and of course yours has always been special, really because of you, because we got to recall. That was also a big deal for me personally, but also the love I remember seeing and feeling between you two was also something that has just stuck with me over the years. So you said you're speaking. What are you doing to try to help other people that are going through a similar journey now?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

So I mean my speaking before this happened was just the talk that I would always give everyone, you got to suck it up and push through it. If I can do it, you can do it. Don't give any excuses. I was asked before this happened last year to do a speaking event. And then that happened and it was inching closer to that time to speak. And I said, I can't give that talk anymore. I can't. It's not truthful. I can't do that. And so I called the people that were putting on this speaking event and I said, "Look, this is what I went through,

and this is what I would like to talk about. If you don't like that, then I'm going to have to cancel. But this is what I would like to talk about."

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

And they were in total agreement that it was okay for me to talk about that. And it went so well that I got hired three other times after that, from that same speaking event to go do different ones. That I said, this has an impact. This does have meaning behind it, and this will help 10 times more than your old speaking events ever will. 10 times more because now you're touchable. Now people can reach you and they can feel you. They're not just looking at someone that they can't touch anymore. Now they can relate to you.

Michael Cowen:

And to me it's an even more powerful message because it's one thing to say yeah, you can go through this stuff and pretend like it doesn't bother you, and keep going on with life and don't let anything stop you. And it's another thing to say, look this is really hard, but you can overcome it. There is hope.

Michael Cowen:

You know what I'm saying? It's the adding the reality of yes, I went through something that really sucked, and it's still hard, but I'm here and I have a life, and I have a husband and a son and I'm doing great things. I think that there is an even more powerful message of perseverance and strength that comes from that. It's a less superficial, deeper strength, if that makes any sense. It's not just the physical strength. It's the everything strength.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

When before to me physical strength was everything.

Michael Cowen:

Well, it was a different kind of mental strength. But I mean to me, like I said, I could always see some denial in there, but at the other hand, we can only handle so much at once. And you had such an enormity of it, so I'm definitely not going to criticize. And like you said, it's the journey you had to go through. You weren't ready at that point. So this is an attorney podcast. So having been through everything you've been through, as attorneys, part of our role is to go fight for our clients and try to get money and try to hold wrong accountable.

Michael Cowen:

But another thing we have to do is we have to companion our clients on this journey that they're going through. And we don't always know everything because there's always a... Like I said, everyone is trying to put up the appearance, people don't always want to admit everything to themselves, much less to someone else, everything they're going through. Can you give us any advice on what we can do to better companion people through these tough situations?

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I mean I think what you did for me was incredible. And I don't think I appreciated it back then, as much as I do now. You took me to go see a therapist, you put me through what I went through with, what was her name again?

Michael Cowen:

Pat Montes

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

Yeah. You put me through that, which I didn't appreciate it then, but I do now. And you put me with the therapist, which I didn't appreciate then, but I do now, and with the physical doctor that I did not appreciate, but I do now. And even though I didn't appreciate them back then, it's like, you were instilling in me what I needed to do, even though I didn't want to do it. And even though I didn't like it. It was already instilled in me, this is what you need to do to get better. So I already knew after what happened last year, I need to go see a therapist. I need to go see a doctor. I need to be more open about this.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I need to say that the accident does hurt me because every other therapist that I talk to... "Do you think that your car accident may have something to do with this?" "No. I went through that so beautifully. No, that has nothing to do with what's happening right now." And they're just like "you sure?" And I'm like, "I'm sure. I'm sure." I was like, "let's work on what's happening now." And I admit it now. And it was a lot of sessions with my therapist of me talking about the accident and me crying about it, and me feeling what I should have felt back then.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

But I think you setting up those stepping stones for me was really helpful. Even if your client doesn't appreciate it, even if your clients are in denial about it, it's still helpful to put the help out there. And for them to know that maybe instilling it a little bit more, that you're no less stronger than who you are if you ask for help. Because I had to learn that the hard way, because in my mind asking for help was a weakness. It was a big, big weakness. And if it was instilled in me, really hit hard in the head with, Hey, if you ask for help, it's okay. It's okay. You can still go lift all those weights. You can still be strong. It's not going to make you any weaker.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

I think it's just a reminder to them because not everybody's going to accept therapy, not everyone's going to accept any of those things, because they may not be ready yet. But they also may be like me in thinking that it is a weakness or I don't need that because I'm not crazy. Just because you're getting help doesn't mean you're crazy. I would suggest everybody get therapy.

Michael Cowen:

Me too.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

No matter who you are, every single person in the world should be in therapy. Whether you think you experience anxiety or not, whether you think you experienced depression or not, whatever it may be, you should be in therapy. No matter who you are, you should be in therapy. And just realizing that you were no weaker or any less stronger because you're getting help. You're actually 10 times stronger for getting help. And I remember I will never forget the nurse telling me that day. He was actually disabled too. And he looked at me and I'll never forget him.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

He goes, "I hope you know that I am so proud of you today. And I hope you know that you are no less stronger for asking me for help." And I will never forget him ever because I think just him being disabled and he was seeing that I was disabled. He knew, he could feel it. He could sense it. And him telling me that was a big deal, was a big, big deal. I needed to hear someone tell me that. I've heard that people were proud of me all the time, but never because I got help. Never.

Michael Cowen:

Well Krystal, thank you so much for sharing this. I'm so proud to know you. I'm so proud to have had the opportunity to have represented you and please continue to keep in touch. I mean, it's been nice that we've been able to keep in touch somewhat over the years when I'm in Florida, I could try to visit. And so I'll be in Orlando in January with my whole firm. So hopefully we can-

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

We could go to Disney World.

Michael Cowen:

We can go to Disney World. A lot of the people said that their kids would kill them, but they went to Disney without them. And we're just doing like just the employees because we're trying to... It's like my, one of my thank yous to the people that work here is we try to do something for them every year. So we're going to do Universal as a group, but then I'm sure that we can go into Disney. I told my wife and kids, if y'all want to come up, that's fine. If not, I'm going to go to Disney.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

That's the best... To be honest.

Michael Cowen:

Okay. Well thank you so much.

Krystal Cantu-Cuate:

You're very welcome. Thank you for having me.

Michael Cowen:

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