

- Speaker 1: [00:00](#) Welcome to the inaugural episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast. If you've ever felt a little bit uninspired with modern life, have felt the pull to get back to your roots or maybe just find yourself being drawn to Mason jars and chickens and you don't know why this will be your new favorite podcast. So this very first episode is all about my personal journey into homesteading. Now, regardless of whether you have a homestead right now or you're just dreaming of one in the future, this episode is going to give you some really actionable information and I think it's really going to inspire you as well to know that really anything is possible no matter your situation, where you live or your background. Because once you hear my story, you'll understand how I am the most unlikely homesteader and really in a million years I couldn't have guessed that we would be doing what we're doing today.
- Speaker 1: [01:12](#) I'm your host Jill Winger. And for the last 10 years I have been helping folks learn how to leave the rat race and create the life they really want by taking the best of the old ways and weaving them into our everyday modern lives. So I'm super excited for this episode. You know, if you've followed me on my blog or on Instagram or youtube, then you've heard some of our origins story before of how Christian and I started this homestead path. So some of this might be familiar to a few of you, but today I really want to dive in deeper than I've ever gone before into our backgrounds. And really what was the catalyst for us starting this extremely unorthodox journey and lifestyle that's completely changed our lives and really has been one of the best things that's ever happened to us.
- Speaker 1: [02:09](#) I think the cool thing about our story is that we really didn't have any sort of agricultural background to start with. We didn't come from a farming or ranching family. We were typical city kids growing up 1200 miles apart. But our childhoods mirrored each other in terms of where we lived and kind of what we were doing. It's an interesting story of how we came together, but it really serves as proof that no matter where you are or what, you know now, if you have homesteading in your brain and you can't stop thinking about it, it's doable and you can make this happen. Grab something, drink, sit back and let's dive into how Christian and I went from two city kids who knew nothing about homesteading to full fledged homesteaders with milk cows and gardens and the works.
- Speaker 1: [03:13](#) I grew up in a very typical kind of a suburban neighborhood. It was actually a rural neighborhood, so we were a few miles from town, but we were definitely locked in by houses on each side. I think the lot that I grew up on was like a quarter acre. It wasn't

a tiny postage stamp size backyard, but it definitely was not a farm by any means. And there were neighbors on all sides and we were for all intents and purposes in town, even though it took us a few minutes to drive into the heart of our local area. However, I was kind of a weirdo right from the start. So at a very, very young age, which I'll still never understand exactly why, I had an obsession with country life, which is just kinda crazy cause I wasn't exposed to it necessarily at that age.

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When I was three and four years old, I was fascinated with cowboys and horses and farm life. And I remember as I was growing up, I would ask my parents this constantly, do we live in the city or the country? Because I knew we were kind of out of town, but I also knew we lived in a neighborhood and they would say we live half in half. We live half in the city and half in the country. So it really was this bizarre obsession right from the beginning. I remember when I was nine or 10 years old, I would get our wheelbarrow and I would push it around our yard and pretend like I was mucking out stalls on a farm.

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I just loved even just being around a wheelbarrow because it symbolized farm life to me. So anyway, that was me as a child. Not exactly normal, but hey, it's worked out well. Even though I didn't have a farm or ranch background, I knew I wanted to pursue that as I got older. Initially the avenue that I really saw as being the path for me was horses. As I got a little bit older into my teen years, I started to focus maybe less on farm life per se, and really shifted over into focusing on the horse industry. And I got my first horse, I remember I had like three jobs when I was 13 and 14, I was babysitting and I was cleaning stalls at a local barn and doing odd jobs here and there so I could save up money to buy my first horse.

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So I've got the horse and I started doing 4-H and I started to dream of a career in the horse industry. The horses really gave me, I think a powerful way to feel like I was a part of agriculture, even though we'd still didn't live on a farm, you know, we didn't have chickens or cows or anything like that, but we were able to board my horse a few miles away and we got to borrow horse trailers and I got to go and do horsey things. And that pretty much satisfied my obsession for rural living at that point. Now an interesting thing that I remember feeling a lot growing up, and maybe some of you will relate to this, is I felt like kind of an outsider looking in to the agricultural world and I don't feel like anyone in the agricultural world ever made me feel like this on purpose.

- Speaker 1: [07:17](#) I don't think it was malicious at all, but there was almost this pervasive thought that if you're not born with a ranch or farm family, then you're kind of out of luck. Or at least that was the perception I had as a child. So I kind of felt like I didn't win the lottery because I wasn't born into this farm or ranch family and I, it was kind of disheartening. The horses gave me a way to feel like I was a part of that community. And then as we'll talk about here in a minute, homesteading really brought that full circle. But I think it's important to acknowledge that piece because if you did grow up with a farmer, ranch family, or you have been an agricultural whole life, you know, that's so awesome and such a blessing. But for those of us who didn't have that, sometimes it can be a little bit disorienting to want that so badly and feel like you can only get it if you're born into it.
- Speaker 1: [08:12](#) Back to the horse topic. I was doing horses, I was getting closer to graduating high school. I remember my mom took me to the local university to kind of figure out what the heck I was gonna do with my life. And we talked about some different options. Nothing felt quite right that, you know, they said I could go into maybe ag business and then work at a bank someday. Which I was like, no, that's just not me. And you know, different options like that. So long story short, I ultimately settled on coming to a tiny little community college in Wyoming, 1200 miles away because they had a good equine program. I think I forgot to mention this at the beginning, but I grew up in North Idaho up in the panhandle. Even though Idaho and Wyoming touch each other there, you know, I was literally opposite ends of both states.
- Speaker 1: [09:08](#) So I went from North Idaho to southeast Wyoming, which is about as far as you can possibly get from each other and still be in those two states. I decided at age 18 I was going to pack up my truck. I had a F-150 two wheel drive and I was going to come to Wyoming, go to this community college and pursue a career in the horse industry. I loved the college. It was a great experience. You know, you can't beat getting to ride horses as a part of your curriculum and getting like credit for it. It was fabulous. While I was at that college, one day I was working on a part of the barn crew and part of our job was at 6:00 AM every morning we would go into the roping boxes and the roping shoots.
- Speaker 1: [10:02](#) This is where the Rodeo kids would practice their ropings. If you've ever been to a Rodeo, you know they have the horses, they'd back into the box, they released the calf and out they go and they rope the calf or the steer or whatever. But my job was to go in the next morning after Rodeo practice and scrape the

liquid cow manure out of all of the chutes. They had a concrete floor and clean up all the manure and there was, I dunno, about six inches of very liquid cow manure and we've used this giant scraper and scrape it out. But anyway, that was my job and every morning I would be there doing that. And one morning I saw this electrician guy, he was there wiring the arena, they are putting in a new sound system and we saw each other in passing.

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I think he noticed me more than I noticed him. I was really not on the lookout for anyone at that point. You know, it was 6:00 AM I had no makeup, hair was up in a messy bun, covered in cow manure. So it was very glamorous. Of course. And long story short, that was Christian and we didn't end up connecting at the arena, but we ended up connecting at a church that we coincidentally ended up both going to a few months later. We started dating and the rest is history. He asked me to marry him on horseback and there we were. I like to say that our relationship really began in a barn and this setting was a foreshadowing of where we would end up in the future. But as a newlywed couple we were very aware that we didn't want do things like everybody else.

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And what I mean by that is we knew for a fact that we didn't want to just fall into this societal drift of getting jobs that we didn't really love, buying a house in town that was close to things because you know, we didn't want to drive and just really falling into that path that we felt like was expected of us as a young couple. And that just didn't feel right for us. However, we didn't really know what we would do instead. We didn't know the path that would take us away from that. But I remember very vividly at that point in my life talking to my sister, who's always been one of my closest confidants and just saying, man, I don't want that. I just know I meant to do something else, but I just don't know what it is yet.

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We kind of just thought with that for a little while, we were renting a small house out in the country. The rent was dirt cheap. We loved the steadying. It gave us a place to board our horses and have some freedom, but we couldn't live there forever. And we knew that eventually we would have to or we would want to purchase our first home. So we were there for about a year and a half. We had saved up enough money to put down on a down payment and we started getting the itch to own our own place. And you know, naturally we didn't want to go buy a starter house in town even though we knew it would be more affordable and closer to jobs and all of that stuff. Christian and I, as you will find out throughout this podcast,

we'd like to do things the hard way sometimes. We had this audacious dream that we would have our first house be in the country now for both of us, even though we had no rural background, we had had this obsession and dream to own our own land for years since we were little kids, both of us.

Speaker 1: [14:03](#) And I remember even on our first date, we were sitting at Chili's restaurant eating hamburgers and just talking and getting to know each other. I asked him what his longterm dreams and goals were and he said, you know, I want to own a ranch someday. And I said, oh my gosh, so do I. Which again, completely illogical and crazy for two city kids with no idea what they're doing to be saying. But we both had that shared goal. And for us owning land, even if it was just a little bit of land felt like the ultimate because it would be ours and we could put down our roots there and you know, land is not something they're making any more of. So it felt like a really awesome, worthwhile investment. So we started house shopping, we looked at a couple of different places and you know, to get land plus the house, then we kind of wanted a barn cause we had some horses.

Speaker 1: [14:59](#) Things are pricey, you know, that can be a considerable chunk of change, especially when you're newlyweds, you know, buying your first place. It was a tall order. I'll never forget, I looked at the mls listing, you know, where they list all the houses in the area. I believe it was the day before Memorial Day on in 2008. We had had some friends over for a barbecue. They had bought a farm not too long prior to that and she had said, hey, if you're looking for property, instead of going to realtor websites, go to the mls cause they have everything, which, you know, I was young, I had no idea. I was like light bulb, I'm going to try that. As soon as they left, I ran into our computer, looked up the website and low and behold there was this little yellow farm house with sixty seven whole acres and some outbuildings.

Speaker 1: [15:56](#) And I was just convinced that was the place for us. It was like late night on, I think it was Friday, Memorial Day weekend. And so naturally it's going to be hard to get ahold of a realtor, but I was convinced I was going to make it happen. On Saturday morning we called up a realtor, we started to see if we could go look at the house and it wasn't too far from where we were renting at that time. So thankfully the realtor was willing to meet us there and the minute we step foot on that property, I knew it was to be ours and now I think I saw it differently than it actually was because I was so blinded by a potential. But in reality it was kind of a sad little property. You know, it had been neglected for many, many years. Later we would find out that it

had a string of renters in it that just did not take care of it and really kind of destroyed the place.

Speaker 1: [16:58](#) Um, it was a tiny house, about 900 square feet. And thankfully the man who was selling it had purchased it in complete destruction and he had gutted it and brought it to a point where it was livable. He had basically just stripped the house down to bare bones cause it was in such bad condition and he had put in new sheet rock, a new carpet, new floors and things like that. So it was livable. Now, as far as the rest of the outbuildings went, they weren't so hot. There was a cinder-block barn and a cinder block shop. Thankfully, even though cinderblocks are not the most beautiful building material, they were kind of the saving grace because they ensured that the barns didn't rot over the years. So they were sturdy and strong, not gorgeous, but they were packed full of trash.

Speaker 1: [17:55](#) Like I'm talking, you walked into these buildings and the trash piles were up to your waist. It was everything from boxes of old Christmas ornaments, car parts, old clothes, every manner of trash imaginable. Um, the barbed wire fences were really old. The posts were crumbling, the wires were broken in pieces together. The grass was tall and there was weeds everywhere. You could hardly see the driveway. And my personal favorite part, there was an old washing machine in the front yard, complete with old moldy clothes inside. So, you know, I'm painting this picture for you. You can see this wasn't exactly a showcase property, but when Christian and I walked onto this place, we knew this was going to be ours. We're not folks who take a long time to make decisions usually, which can be a good thing. Sometimes it's not so good, but it actually played out in our favor this time.

Speaker 1: [19:01](#) And so we put things into motion immediately to start getting this house. I think we couldn't get a first time home buyers sort of set up with a bank because it was, you know, 67 acres and they're kind of like, hey, your first time home buyer sort of thing is supposed to be for a little houses in town. So we had to kind of work around that. But, uh, our down payment was the sufficient and the good thing about buying a property that is in such bad shape, it didn't cost a whole lot. So we were able to get that land that we wanted to really more than anything and get things rolling without having to stretch our finances too much. As you probably guessed, that little rundown property is where we live today. And if you ever want to see pictures of that, there are plenty of them.

- Speaker 1: [19:59](#) On my blog and I'll leave some links to the particular blog posts that have those photos. We'll put those in the show notes, but it's come a long way. When we initially closed on that house, the house we have now, we signed the paperwork. Something came over me and prior to that really, you know I wanted, I knew we wanted to live in the country. I knew we wanted room for our horses. That was kind of our main goal in purchasing a property outside of town, but I had forgotten the piece of me that had craved chickens and big red barns and that sort of lower country life as a child. That part of me had been hibernating and when we purchased this property, I remember walking onto it a few days before we finalize the paperwork. I was literally hit with this, I don't know how to describe it, almost like a lightning bolt of inspiration.
- Speaker 1: [21:01](#) It was almost a sort of spiritual experience. As I started to think of all the things that were possible now that we were land owners and I'll never forget it. I remember going home to our rental property that we were packing up and getting ready to leave. And I didn't sleep for three or four nights, not because I was nervous, but because I was so wildly excited to get started. And of course, you know, I wanted that property for our horses, but I started to think, what else could we do with this property? How else could we make it profitable? What else could we grow? Maybe we could even grow food and maybe we could grow food that would offset our grocery budget, which would help that property technically almost start paying for itself. You know, it's never going to really pay for its entire mortgage payment, but it's going to help help off that things.
- Speaker 1: [21:59](#) I started dreaming and scheming and I couldn't get it out of my head. Now once we got on the property, you know, it took us a few months to get things sorted out and get moved in. We had to rebuild a lot of the fence just so it would be safe for our horses to be here. That took us a little while since it was in such bad shape. So I got distracted with that for just a few months. And then one day I got to thinking, well, we have these horses and anyone who has horses knows that they produce a lot of horse manure. It's a byproduct, right? And there's this pile of horse manure growing in the backyard. And I knew that it would be a while before we could afford a tractor that could move the horse manure or spread the horse manure. And I thought, I don't want this pile to look like Mount Everest in a year or two.
- Speaker 1: [22:52](#) What on earth are we going to do with it? So I got the wild idea that hey, we can turn this manure into compost. Right? And I got some books from the library kind of prior to that point. Compost was a foreign concept to me. I got some books, started

figuring out. I learned that it has to be piled high and needs to have some moisture. It needs to be able to get hot enough in the middle to kill weeds, seeds and make it really, really good. I convinced Christian to take some of the old scrap lumber we found lying around the property and build me these two cute little compost bins and we built them on the edge of our yard. We didn't even have a garden tilled up yet. There was not a garden plot when we purchased the property and we were still figuring out where that would be.

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But I knew I had this compost bin, so we built two side by side, one that would hold the fresh compost and one that could hold the finished compost. And I'll admit Christian was not overwhelmingly excited to build the bins because we had so many other projects to do at that point. But I was dead set. It was going to happen. And so he dutifully did his job and as we were drilling postholes that night in August and nailing the old boards up, I just knew that this was the beginning of something bigger. And I started to dream of the garden where I would mix the compost into the soil and the vegetables that would grow from that nourished rich soil. And then all the things I could do with the vegetables, the canning and the fermenting and how I could use the vegetable scraps to eventually feed a flock of chickens that I was of course going to get next.

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And then the chickens would give us eggs and then we could get a milk cow and the milk cow would add more manure to the pile that would in turn nourish the garden and start the process all over again. I like to say that our homesteading journey really was started by a compost pile and that was really the first step that we took into making our dreams bought this property. And for those of you who have followed me online, you know, the rest is really history from that point forward. It was a process of learning new skills and trying new things, making lots of mistakes. And you fast forward to where we are now. We're still in that same little property, but it looks a lot different now. We remodeled the house, we've added new barns, new fence lines, new gardens. It's a thriving, productive homestead now instead of a sad little abandoned farm property and homesteading has, without sounding cliché, seriously changed our life.

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Homesteading not only fulfill those dreams that Christian and I had as children, but it gave us that foothold in the agricultural world that we had always wanted but thought was unattainable for us since we weren't born into it. And it gave us a lot of confidence. You know, we went from kids who didn't really know what, how to do anything, to knowing how to build buildings and milk a cow and breed cattle and grow vegetables

and build fence and handle animals and do everything in between. And so it really boosted our skillset, which in turn just fed our creativity and our confidence and has been a game changer for us all the way around. Now, homesteading is also helped us to create a tribe of likeminded. And I'll tell that story in a later episode, but that's also been really valuable to find folks who are likeminded and who think the way we do and have the same aspirations.

Speaker 1: [26:55](#) That's a really valuable piece to find those friends and colleagues. And that's been a priceless part of this journey. So as we wrap this up and I want to think about how you can apply this to your own life and your own homesteading journey, no matter where you are, no matter if you plan to get your homestead next year or in 10 years, or maybe you're living a life and on the homestead right now, I've been thinking about, you know, what really made Christian and I successful at the beginning and what gave us the most ability to really create the homestead of our dreams. And I think there were a few things. The first one is that we were willing to just dive in. And what I see a lot of folks get stuck on in homesteading or in other goals in their life is that they tend to suffer from paralysis by analysis.

Speaker 1: [27:57](#) And it's so easy to spend so much time researching and planning and looking at all the options that you can almost get into that cycle permanently. And you never push yourself off the ledge, jump off the cliff and start moving forward. And so keep that in mind. It's okay to educate yourself and to learn and to analyze. But at some point you just got to pull the trigger and go. The other thing that was a huge part of our success was our willingness to make mistake. And holy cow, we have made some big ones. Every mistake under this fund. We've been there, done that. The trick is is we didn't let them knock us down permanently. So we made the mistake, we picked ourselves up, shook ourselves off, and kept moving forward. And then the third and final thing was that we were able to teach ourselves.

Speaker 1: [28:56](#) And that's not to say that there isn't a time and place for mentors or having local friends come and show you the ropes. But if you can really hone your ability to teach yourself skills or at least to get yourself started and you can use books or blogs or podcasts or youtube videos and you can get really good at understanding how you learn and how to absorb the information and then apply it, that will take you a very long way. Because in our age of information, you know, it's never been so easy to learn new skills. I don't care if it's underwater basket weaving or how to milk a cow. There is an article or a

blog post or a video out there that's going to show you how to do that. If you can understand how to take that information, apply it and take action on it, there's really nothing you can't teach yourself.

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Well with a few exceptions, maybe let's not learn brain surgery or rocket science from Youtube, but you know what I mean. So that's the beginning of our journey and I can't wait to dive into more of the moving pieces in future episodes. We'll be talking about how we started our homestead on just one income. Being debt free has been a really big part of Christian and I's story and really enabled us to do what we wanted to do long term. We'll talk about how we started our businesses that now fund and fuel all of our homestead projects and beyond. Uh, some of the mistakes we made. We'll be talking a lot about the mistakes cause there's lots of them. Um, what to look for when you're looking for your first homestead property. Lots of good stuff coming up. So if you're ready to do this homestead thing, but you're feeling a little bit unsure of where or how to start, well you're in the right place because that is my specialty.

Speaker 1: [30:57](#)

I have created an entire library of resources. Just for homesteaders like you, whether you're new or experienced, and you can get complimentary access to this library right now at [theprairiehomestead.com/grow](http://theprairiehomestead.com/grow) we're going to leave a link to that in the show notes, but if you just go in there, type in your email, you're going to get instant access to this library. I'm covering everything from homestead action plans where you can fill out a template, garden guides, chicken stuff, cooking information and everything in between, and that's all for this episode. Folks. Thanks for listening and I would be so grateful if you would hit subscribe and jump over to iTunes and leave a quick review. That's all for today, but I can't wait to see you in the next episode of the old fashioned on purpose podcast.