

EPISODE 1436

[INTRODUCTION]

Amy Sylvis (AS): Knowing in the back of my mind the nature of the illness, the progressive nature of the illness, being in and out of the hospital, I did have a career in biotech but always in the back of my mind, I was concerned about what would happen with that inevitable day when I wouldn't be able to trade my time for money, where my body would not allow me to work and bring an income.

Whitney Sewell (WS): This is your daily Real Estate Syndication Show. I'm your host Whitney Sewell. Today our guest has an amazing story of overcoming a major challenge that I know is going to encourage you. It's gonna help you to put some perspective on challenges that you think you are facing. Her name is Amy Sylvis. Prior to working in multifamily real estate, Amy spent 13 years in the pharmaceutical and biotech industries. She was attracted to the industry because of her previous health challenges and wanted to help others navigate illness. Today, Amy is the founder and principal of Sylvis Capital with apartment investments in Alabama, Indiana, Georgia, Tennessee, and Texas. Amy and I go through many topics of her overcoming a major challenge that I know you're going to learn and be encouraged from. We're going to jump through some beginner things that anyone needs to know as you're getting started in this space. And then we're gonna dive into a third segment with some more detailed things around market research and acquisitions. And then just some detailed questions that I know you're gonna enjoy as well at the end and learn a lot from well.

[INTERVIEW]

WS: So often challenges helped shape us in a big way. Our guest today has just an amazing story of a challenge that has pushed her in many ways. I know it's gonna challenge our listeners and hopefully encourage you all in a massive way. Amy, welcome to the show.

AS: Whitney, what an honor. Thank you so much for inviting me on.

WS: Yeah, honored to have you on. I love stories like yours. And I just think it's interesting when folks like yourself are willing to share things like this, it helps all of us, right? There are so many who have similar challenges but are afraid to even ask for help. And, you know, in your case, look at what's happened in your life. And so anyway, I want to jump right into it. Let's dive into your story and how you overcame and then we're gonna dive into where and what this has led to in your real estate career as well.

AS: Absolutely. So, I am 41 years old, I love to lead with that. You can see my gray hair and my wrinkles. I'm proud of it all because I was born with a medical condition called cystic fibrosis. I find that many people have heard of that but aren't quite sure you know what it is and how it impacts folks. So, essentially, it's a genetic condition that mainly impacts my lungs. I was born in 1981 and my prognosis - my poor parents heard from the doctors - I would live to be maybe 16 or 18 years old. So, you can see why I'm always so excited as a woman to share my age. And yeah, so part of the condition is the progressive deterioration of lung function that leads to a number of lung infections every year, weeks and weeks of hospitalization and of coughing, and, you know, tough things around that. So it was definitely a condition that I, again, I was born with, learned to struggle with, but also claim victory over and we can dive into that as you'd like Whitney,

WS: That's awesome. I just, again, appreciate your transparency around it. I just think about how it can hinder so many people, right? When you get some kind of diagnosis like this, and I was thinking about even your parents, you know, at that time and what, what a hurdle to have to overcome, right? Just mentally and then just come along beside you. But, speak to, what did that look like a little bit, you know, as far as not being hindered by this mentally in such a way that you just laid down? Because you obviously didn't do that. What did that look like being able to overcome this mentally and being able to see a way to overcome?

AS: Absolutely. To your point, you know, everyone has struggles, right? I'm not unique and that's one of the reasons why I just love to share the story in hopes to encourage people because I am not the only one that goes through trials and tribulations. You mentioned my parents, I think, you know, it very much started off first with a mindset and my mentality of not only our faith as a family and how that led and was guiding us. But also you know, exposing ourselves to other people who had overcome obstacles and receiving inspiration of yes, you know, science is amazing doctors are amazing but the truth is none of us knows the future. I tried very hard you know as a child but you know even more so and as an adult to maintain the mindset of, yes, but what if things work out well? What if going to college despite, you know, the statistics meant I was laying the groundwork for a great education and a fulfilling life or, you know, later on real estate? What if I actually tried to get into this industry and could make a difference on many levels and despite the odds be able to, you know, be successful in this space? So, it's a little bit of a fighting spirit of what can I really do but also, yeah, faith and belief and belief in myself and knowing that others have defied the odds before me; so, why not me?

WS: Love that. Was there a specific story of someone who overcame something difficult that kind of helped you to do the same?

AS: Gosh, even within my own cystic fibrosis community, I think, we all do well when we see others that are kind of like us, are similar to us. I remember growing up and especially as a teenager, I had a friendship with a woman that was in her forties with CF. And at that time, I think she was maybe one of only a handful in the whole world that really defied those odds. And, you know, none of us will really know exactly how she got there. You know, I have my own opinions about faith and blessings. But it was just such an inspiration to me, her friendship, wow, just really propelled me into expanding my mind as to what was possible, despite, you know, some of the other negative aspects of my life. So, that friendship was everything to me growing up,

WS: I feel like it's another great example of how we can often let others, including doctors, give us limiting beliefs, right? We feel like they're speaking the gospel to us, whatever they say

is just in concrete But it's not always true, right? And they are doing their best with what they know, however, through this lady just allowed you to expand your mindset of what was possible. And I just feel like that's so important. So, incredible. How old were you then?

AS: Gosh, so I think I first met her when I was 12. And I was friends with her all the way up until, unfortunately, she passed in her mid-50s but that led me into my mid-20s. So, it was a very, very formative relationship.

WS: Wow, incredible. Another thought was who we surround ourselves with, right? It's so important, and those that are ahead of us. And I'm constantly looking for those people as well. They share some of the same fundamental things that are so important to me, obviously, my faith and family and keeping those things at the forefront while also being successful in business. And oftentimes, those things don't always mesh together, right. And so, you know, I'm just constantly looking for those people. But even for you here, man, you know, this, this woman was instrumental. So, tell us how maybe that has helped you in other obstacles, you know, even moving forward?

AS: I love that question. Because to your point, it does stack on what you were saying, Whitney, we really are, we become who we surround ourselves by. And I love that notion of it, maybe you follow it too, Whitney, but if I'm the smartest person in the room, I'm doing something wrong, especially in business or education. I remember deciding to get my MBA and being incredibly intimidated by the high caliber of people that I was around, their backgrounds, their intellect. And, you know, I don't think less of myself, but you can really tell when you're around some pretty brilliant people, and then again, in real estate. But the reality is their high performance, their expansive thinking, their abundance, mindset, all of those things elevate me. So, removing my ego, whether in business or education, all of that was really built upon being when I was younger, making sure I was surrounding myself by other people with cystic fibrosis that were defying the odds, and who were where I want it to be.

WS: Yeah, you know, as I have grown professionally, personally, it's a constant search of those people. And I've even, you know, seek that out and spiritually as well, you know, it's like

finding people that are ahead of me, you know, in the faith. I didn't apply it there at first, you know, and then finally, one day, I was like, okay, it just doesn't make any sense, right? I'm always seeking this out in business, why aren't I seeking it out in other areas of my life as well? So I think it's said very well, you know, obviously, many years have passed for you, and you've overcome, and you have that story that's just driving you and now driving many others, I'm sure. Where did real estate come into the picture? What you have another career that you were seeking? And then real estate? Or what was that story?

AS: Yes, thank you for asking. So as you can imagine, knowing in the back of my mind, the nature of the illness, the progressive nature of the illness, being in and out of the hospital, I did have a career in biotech but always in the back of my mind, I was concerned about what would happen with that inevitable day when I wouldn't be able to trade my time for money, where my body would not allow me to work and bring an income. And you know, my parents would kill me for saying this but I never wanted to have to turn to them truly to ask them for money or support as an adult because they sacrificed so much. Raising a disabled child just always had it in my mind that I wanted to be self-sufficient. So, I was on this almost decade-long quest while I was working in biotech in marketing and sales to find a way to support myself when my health declined.

AS: Thankfully, I stumbled upon what I think many of us know that little purple book by Robert Kiyosaki called Rich Dad, Poor Dad that really expanded my brain to help me understand this concept of passive income. You know, I grew up here in Los Angeles, very humble background, my father is a manual laborer, he still manually labors today at 67 years old. So, this concept of doing anything other than trading my time for money just wasn't even a part of my world. The book really changed my way of thinking and quite honestly gave me a lot of hope for being able to be self-sufficient by eventually investing in real estate and generating passive income.

WS: Wow, yeah, that book has changed so many people's lives. And if nothing else, just open your mind to the possibility, if nothing else. I, as well, I'm into that purple book. But it didn't happen right away.

AS: Yes.

WS: From what I know. And maybe you can just shed some light there. Your real estate career didn't just boom, the moment that you read that book, right?

AS: How cool would that have been, right? How great would it be that we all set our goals and then all of a sudden with a snap of a finger, we reach them. Sometimes God or the universe or whatever you'd like to say, you know, needs to bring us through some educational or some trials to get us there so we can learn and become better. That was definitely a part of my story. So, while in biotech, I was balancing that W-2, which was already extremely hard for me to do, because I was also, you know, battling the full-time job of having cystic fibrosis, and then adding on a third almost job of learning how to break into the multifamily real estate space, unfortunately, it landed me even sicker, in the hospital more frequently, and ultimately forced me to medically retire at age 36. I was too sick to work, I wasn't able to get my real estate side hustle if you will, or investment strategy off the ground, and my health was, unfortunately, failing me. So, several failures, but a miracle medication for cystic fibrosis came to the market in 2019, at the end of the year, just before the pandemic. That really allowed me to take advantage of all the groundwork I had laid the previous 10 years and break into the industry with the amazing health I'm blessed with now. And of course, that education and that drive.

WS: Wow, I want to just back up just slightly, you said before we started and I asked you just so the listeners know if I should stay away from anything you said no, could you just paint a little bit of a picture of how the disease hindered you? And you know, just like, the listener just has no excuse, right? It's, I guess, it's the picture I'm trying to paint here, right? Because you know, you kept after it even with a disability. What does that mean to have this kind of disease? Does that mean, I don't know, I'm just trying to think through the difficulties that you had to push through and to paint that picture for the listener and myself.

AS: Yeah, happy to. Well, just the fact that, I don't know, it's been about 20 minutes since I've talked to you, I don't think I've coughed. I may have coughed once or twice. But being able to do that and even have my breath, enough breath to hold on a conversation was something I

couldn't do at the time I had to medically retire. I was far too winded, my lungs were incredibly congested, so much so that sleeping at night even became difficult. I'd be woken up by congestion, coughing, and shortness of breath. So, I'd be kind of in a daze during the day without adequate sleep and being so exhausted. And those were good days, the bad days, were having, even more, go on with my lungs where there were these virulent infections that were mostly antibiotic resistance. And the antibiotics that were available had to be administered under tremendous monitoring in-patient in the hospital for two to three weeks at a time where basically my life would be halted and I'd be candidly felt like I was in jail, trapped in the hospital just fighting for breath and hoping that my situation wouldn't get so dire that I would need a lung transplant.

WS: Okay, I just hope, you know, it's so helpful when I think about the things that we complain about throughout the day, or, you know, we're complaining as we're, you know, working full time and trying to get the real estate business going and all this. I just hope that helps put it in perspective a little bit, that you made this happen, you know, such a hurdle here that you had to climb, and you did it. Congratulations to you, by the way. It's just incredible. But 10 years, right, many tries to get into multifamily real estate, what were some of those tries like over those 10 years?

AS: Yes. As you can imagine living in Los Angeles, I'm crazy enough to live here close to my family. So that's why I'm here. That's the most important thing to me. But investing here just wasn't an option on several levels. So looking for neighboring markets like Phoenix was a market I really focused heavily on and you know, starting off on a small scale I looked at quadplexes, triplexes, just anything to kind of get some experience. I was under contract several times with several different opportunities. And while they looked to be good opportunities, again over this 10-year period of time, it was almost like clockwork, that I would land back in the hospital, too sick to do due diligence, too, you know, sick to even communicate with brokers or the seller, and caveat, this was before I kind of realized the team nature of this business. I probably could have managed to get a little bit further had I built a team around me, but I was really flying solo at the time. So, yeah, it was really, unfortunately,

things just didn't get off the ground because my health kept landing me too sick to work. And those obstacles were pretty challenging to overcome at the time.

WS: What about pushback from family, friends, anybody, Amy, that's like, okay, Amy, you know, why are you continuing to try to do this? Or any pushback like that?

AS: I love that question. Because I actually asked my parents that quite a bit as I age. I don't have children of myself, but I think I have enough wisdom and empathy to be able to put myself in my parents' position. And my gosh, I think I would have said that myself had I been my own parent, thinking, you know, why are you pushing yourself so hard? You're doing fine. Your primary job is to care for your health. But, my parents had been some of my biggest cheerleaders and have believed in me even when I didn't think I was physically capable or I didn't think I was physically capable of doing it. So, without a doubt the blessing of having parents like that, that were really in my corner, I really wonder if I would have had the courage and the tenacity to keep going forward instead of my darker days if God didn't bless me with such, such incredible family.

WS: That's incredible. It even goes back to what we're talking about who you surround yourself with, right? Thankfully, they were encouraging on your side in this. So, 10 years, many tries, what finally was the breakthrough for your real estate business?

AS: The irony is COVID was the breakthrough; if you can believe that. In November 2019, I get this miracle medication. Almost overnight, my coughing resolves, and I have more energy. I've got more color to my face, even my physical outward appearance changes. And then we all remember March 2020, right? Raise your hand if you happen to remember that. And even though I was in a much better place, health-wise, I still had permanent lung damage from almost 40 years of having this illness. The drug doesn't reverse the permanent damage, but of course, makes me more healthy and stable. So I was sheltering in place. I was pretty much, my husband and I were isolated at our place here in Los Angeles, just making sure you know, while everyone figured out what was going on, and that I wasn't ill, or I didn't become ill.

Interestingly enough, as with so many setbacks, it happened to be quite a launching pad, because suddenly the whole world opened up to me over zoom.

I wasn't the only one staying at home, countless people were saying at home, talking to brokers over zoom or over the phone, or having boots on the ground, do due diligence, obviously, again, still not investing in Los Angeles, all of this became the norm. And I had all the time in the world to utilize my newfound health and to grow my business. So yes, I had to take a few chances. It was a little nerve-wracking to invest during COVID, when, you know, seemingly, there were a lot of wild economic indicators that may have scared many people off. But I was ready to go and it was my launchpad, Whitney.

WS: Wow. What were a couple of steps that you took then that were different from maybe you know, what could have happened a year or two before?

AS: Yes, I found a team, I found a group of like-minded folks that most importantly, had the same values that I did in terms of, you know, we all like to make money. You know, I'm not gonna sit here and deny that money isn't a great thing. But some of us, myself included, probably you, Whitney as well, have a purpose in what we do in multifamily, which is serving our residents, serving our investors. So, finding a group of like-minded folks with complementary skills, and learning that this was a team sport was a major pivot point for me. And I also passively invested with a few folks to get to know the space and become a bit more familiar, we can all read as much as possible and get mentors, all that's really helpful. But finding a way to be in the game. And to learn as we do was a big thing for me as well.

WS: That's incredible. I've heard numerous stories about how COVID has just changed everything for someone's business and even in other industries as well. And that is one of them. It's like well, all of a sudden, everyone is on Zoom, and willing to, much more willing to do business that way, right? Where it seemed like we had to be in person before. So, I love that about your story as well that, hey, this thing that was so difficult for many, provided some opportunities for you.

Give us a little insight into the focus of your business, the type of real estate in the project, how you see it moving forward.

AS: Yes. So, we do invest in large multifamily apartments primarily in the southeast, but a little bit of the Midwest as well. And to your point, we invite investors to invest alongside of us and take advantage of our knowledge and experience. A lot of my investors are in markets that may not necessarily be the best place to invest as they've identified but they have jobs, they have families, they have hobbies, and to really do this investing game well, you need to spend some time doing research and having experience. So, we really offer that opportunity for our investors to take advantage of all of that, that we do for them so they can focus on their lives and we are primarily in multifamily. Industrial will likely be on the horizon for us as well just because of diversification. We think there's a very strong opportunity in that asset class as well.

WS: Amy, I'm grateful for your transparency around just this challenge. I feel like you can encourage so many around that and you are. So, thank you again for that and really pushing through that and just being that encouragement for all of us. Tell the listeners how they can get in touch with you. And we're gonna continue another segment for tomorrow.

AS: Fantastic. So, SylvisCapital.com The last name is spelled a little funky but I'm sure you'll put it in the show notes, if you would, Whitney. But you can learn all about me there. And if you'd like to learn or watch a webinar where I discuss a little more in-depth about what we do, how we choose the markets and the properties we do, you can go to SylvisCapital.com/webinar and learn a bit more there.

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[OUTRO]

WS: Thank you for being a loyal listener of the Real Estate Syndication Show. Please subscribe and like the show. Share it with your friends so we can help them as well. Don't

forget, go to LifeBridgeCapital.com where you can sign up and start investing in real estate today. Have a blessed day.

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