

0:00:00.9 Nicole Antoinette: I'm Nicole Antoinette, and This is Real Talk Radio, a podcast filled with honest conversations about everything. Friends, this is our very last episode, that feels so wild to say I'm having a lot of feelings, and to bring things full circle, I am joined today by my friend Alex Franzen, who long time listeners will remember was Real Talk Radio's first ever guest way back in August of 2015, Alex is a writer, consultant and entrepreneur, based in Hawaii. A couple of points during this conversation, you can probably hear the birds outside her window, it's very lovely, she's the author of six books and the founder of the Tiny Press, a publishing imprint, specializing in very short books of 100 pages or less, Alex writes beautifully about topics like life, love, death, grief, unplugging from technology, creativity, focus, productivity, simplicity, time, and how we spend it. In this conversation that you're about to hear, we talk honestly about heartbreak, grief, money, quitting social media and more, and I hope this conversation feels as nourishing for you as it did for me, and whether you've listened to one episode or every episode of Real Talk Radio these past six years, thank you so much for being here.

0:01:25.7 NA: My mission in creating the show is to fill the world with more honest conversations, particularly the kind of conversations in which there are no easy answers. In these 200-plus episodes, we asked a lot of hard questions together, and my guests and I told stories about work, love, sex, money, sobriety, friendship, racism, body image, mental health, grief, fear, big life changes, and so much more. This project, I don't even know how to sum up what this project has meant to me, it's definitely been one of the great joys of my life, and I could not have done it without my sound engineer, Adam Day, who also created the music for the show. He has been with me from the very start. Adam, I'm very grateful for you. You probably had no idea, back in 2015, that that one random email for me when I was like, "Hey, you wanna make the music for this show, can I hire you for this?" Would turn into a six-year creative partnership, but I'm super grateful for it. I also wanna give a shout out and big thanks to my friend and former spouse Paul, who financially supported us while I was getting the show off the ground back in 2015.

0:02:31.5 NA: The listener-funded model that eventually grew to be able to pay everyone involved in this show, including all of the guests for the past few years with higher rates paid to all guests with historically marginalized identities, it's a funding model that I'm so grateful to have been able to build. So thank you to everyone who supported me and this project and these conversations, and while this very iteration of the show will be complete after today, I would love to invite you, if you are feeling like it, to come over into my patreon community and help us build whatever's next, you can find us at patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. It's a really sweet space filled with really fun people that prioritize honest conversations and digital togetherness, there's a monthly private podcast episode series that I do, fun live online gatherings every month, and just lots more good stuff, and it's light in scale, so you can support from whatever place makes sense for you. It's patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. I would love to have you. Hopefully, I will see you there. And in the meantime, please enjoy my conversation with the ever brilliant Alex Franzen.

[music]

0:03:44.8 NA: Alright, we are good to go. Alex, welcome back to the show.

0:03:49.6 Alex Franzen: Yay, I was gonna say, welcome to you too, but it's your show and you're always here, Welcome to us both.

0:03:58.1 NA: Welcome to us both. So set the scene for us. Where in the world are you right now? What can you see from where you're sitting? What did you have for breakfast? Take me into the little lovely details of your day-to-day.

0:04:09.7 AF: Oh, that's fun. Okay, well, for breakfast, I had a piece of sour dough toast with butter and raspberry apricot jam. And it was amazing. I usually have a smoothie for breakfast, I'm kind of been on a smoothie kick lately, but today was like a toast day, it just happened. Where am I? I'm in my office, my home office, I live in Hilo, which is a small city on the east coast of the big island of Hawaii, most people have never heard of it, it's not very big or touristy, but I totally love it. And my office is a little weird right now, I'm kind of in transition 'cause I'm actually moving to a new house fairly soon, so I don't have any artwork on the wall behind me, things are feeling a little like it has halfway packed up transitional feeling. But I can see my beautiful backyard above a green, lush green foliage, my little plants in my office, I've got a photo of my mom and dad on my desk, my dog Zookie is sleeping on the floor underneath me. It's a very peaceful, peaceful moment. What about you, where are you at? What's poppin'?

0:05:29.2 NA: First, any photos and videos that I have seen of you living in this space are just very idyllic.

0:05:36.4 AF: Yeah, it's so interesting, I've lived in Hawaii now full-time for almost three years, which is wild. The time has flown by, and it's very... It's such an interesting experience being an outsider who's not from Hawaii, and now putting down roots here and kind of becoming a local in a way, and it's also... Hawaii is... It's everything you see in the photos and on TV, it's white sand beaches, it's coconuts, it's tropical drinks by the ocean, it's all of that, and it's also like fire ants who sting you when you swim in the river, and hurricanes and tsunamis and volcanic eruptions and poverty and there's this whole side of Hawaii that's really rough and challenging, and folks who live here deal with all the same challenges as folks anywhere else, it is a beautiful quality of life, but it's also real life, you're not on vacation just because you live in Hawaii. Yeah, but I love it, and I really feel like this is my forever home, I've never been happier anywhere in the world.

0:06:57.1 NA: That makes me so happy to hear. I can relate to what you were just saying, sort of the difference between the fantasy of the saying and the reality of the thing, it's the same with van life, honestly, it's very easy to park your van in a gorgeous place and to post really pretty pictures on the internet, and that's real for sure. There's so many benefits of it, and also you're like peeing in a pee jar, squatted over in the van in the middle of the night, and when it's hot, we've been going through a heat wave here and you just lay awake, sweating for hours at night, 'cause you can't really fall asleep until it's cooler, even with the fan on, there's things like that that are very un-sexy, that balance out the really romantic parts of it, I guess.

0:07:41.3 AF: Totally, yeah, it's all of it. It's both.

0:07:44.3 NA: Yeah, so to answer your question, I am currently in Bend, Oregon. This all feels very full circle, you are... This is the final episode of the podcast, you are the final guest, you were also the very first guest, so that to me feels very... I like the closing of the loop with that, right now, I'm sitting in my friend and former spouse, Paul, who you know I am sitting in his guest room, and obviously this is... We shared this house, we were married when I started this podcast. So it's like the beginning of the show and the end of the show are both happening in the exact same place, so I feel grateful when I texted him and said, "I have to record the last episode, can I come do it from your house?" He was like, "Of course", so it's... Yeah, I'm having quite a lot of feelings, I don't know that I expected to feel as emotional like ending the show as I do, but I'm really grateful to be doing this with you.

0:08:38.3 AF: Okay, well, I wanted to ask you as a guest on the show, but also a listener and fan, why end the show? What prompted you to make that decision?

0:08:49.9 NA: Oh, okay, you're gonna ask me questions now. Sure. I wish that I had a really concise, good sound bite answer to that, but I don't think that I do, I think... You know this about me. I tend to have a really good sense in my life of when something is nearing a feeling of completion, whether that's a relationship of any kind, whether it's a creative project or a job and something... In my early and mid-20s, I feel like I was notorious for staying too long in situations because I was afraid to leave, whether again, that was a relationship or a job, rather I wouldn't let myself leave unless I was miserable, I thought that until something was like... Rock bottom, whatever that looked like, that I had to sort of tough it out, and transitioning out of that was a really conscious thing for me to realize like, "Oh, actually you don't have to be miserable in order to make a change in your life, you don't have to wait until something is so bad that you have to change, you're allowed to change just because you want to," and that really has informed I feel like the last 10 years for me, and I just got the sense probably about a year ago, that this project had about a year left, and I don't know, there wasn't... Nothing happened, there wasn't a particular day, I just felt like what I set out to do at the show was starting to feel complete, and it's really important to me to end something before I resent it. If that makes sense.

0:10:16.9 AF: Yeah. That makes total sense. And I think that you're an artist, you're a creative person, and books come to an end, projects come to an end, and a podcast is a funny kind of project because it could sort of go on indefinitely forever and ever if you wanted it to do so, and there's radio shows that have been on the air for 50 years and they're still rolling, but I love that you just had a gut feeling. I call it your heart, your heart and your gut, where your heart was just like, This has been a beautiful project, I've loved it, and I just feel like it's about time to wrap up and move on to the next thing, and you're listening to that. I wanted to ask like this has been a major project for you, you've done what, probably hundreds of episodes at this point...

0:11:11.4 NA: Yeah, well over 200. Yeah.

0:11:12.6 AF: Over 200 episodes, hundreds and hundreds of hours of conversations. Guests from all around the world, from all walks of life. You've covered money, sex, divorce, addiction, and everything in between, and I was wondering, how have you changed as a person since the show

began or because of this project?

0:11:39.0 NA: I've been thinking about that a lot. I feel like it's not an understatement to say that this project changed my life for sure, I mean, it changed my politics, it changed my body image, it changed my finances, the way I think about hustle culture productivity, really everything. Every aspect of my life has been touched by this, I don't know that there's any one thing in particular that I can point to and say, "This is different because of it." I think the biggest takeaway for me is just how much more nuance there is and how few things actually fit into that binary black and white sort of thinking, which has been a big un-learning for me to realize that there's so many different ways to do a career, there's so many different ways to do a romantic relationship, there's just so many more possibilities.

0:12:24.8 NA: And I feel like all of the guests who were brave enough to come on the show and just tell the truth about their lives without an agenda, without necessarily trying to sell anything but just saying, "Hey, this is what it was like for me when my mom died or when I filed for bankruptcy, or when I got that big promotion." Or any of the things that we've talked about, just hearing people be honest about what's true for them, I feel like I was very permission-giving for me to be more honest with myself and also to imagine possibilities where I didn't think that there would be possibilities. And that... A podcast is a secret weapon for making friends with cool people, like highly recommend for people.

0:13:01.7 NA: And I feel super grateful, not just for the new people that I've been able to meet, but it's been interesting getting to interview friends like you, like people who you have a relationship with outside, it's actually really special to be able to have these deeper structured conversations with people in your life, and I've gotten to do that with my partner with various friends, so that feels special, and it's interesting because I don't feel like podcasting is done for me, I love the audio storytelling medium, I'm feeling pretty confident that I'm gonna make another podcast, maybe more than one other podcast, and I don't know that my style would change so much, I'm never not gonna be interested in long form honest conversations, but it just feels like there needs to be a pause before something else starts, and at first I was afraid of ending this before knowing what was next, I think it's a lot easier to walk away from something if you're walking directly to something else, but oftentimes for me, I can't really conceptualize what might be next until there's some open space, and so it feels to me, to be like a brave choice that I'm making within myself to be like, I'm willing to be in that liminal space of I don't know exactly what's next, and I'm willing and curious to see what happens, so thank you for asking.

0:14:17.7 AF: Yeah, and I hope that you'll do something to celebrate the completion of a significant project that has changed your life, it's touched many lives. I know that you've cultivated an amazing listenership of people who, I'm sure, will miss the show, but who also get it and celebrate you moving on to your next project, and I'm one of those people.

0:14:42.7 NA: Well, thanks. Yeah, toward the end of the month in the patreon community, I'm hosting a podcast retirement party actually like a live thing with prize giveaways and other fun stuff, so yeah, I felt that was something my business coach Bear recommended as well of do

something to mark this. Actually that could be an interesting transition of things to talk about something that I have been really practicing in the last, I would say year, maybe a little longer, is intentionally creating a culture of celebration, really making an effort to celebrate even small things. What's going well for you that we can celebrate?

0:15:22.6 AF: Oh my gosh, well, that is a perfect little segue, and we did not even plan this, but I'm totally on the same page. I feel like I want to celebrate more, I wanna have more joy in my life and feel like a kid again, I feel like this last year in particular, I've been doing so much adult-ing and I have an adult-ing hangover. I can't think about mortgage pre-approval applications or retirement plans anymore right now, I need a minute. But one thing that I've been doing is hiring magicians, so I had a little tea party for myself and a few folks who work with me at my company, and we hired a magician to provide entertainment and they did a performance for us on zoom, which was amazing. And I was like, "Well, that was great. But hiring one magician is not enough, I need to go further." So then we hired another magician to do a presentation for our customers, and they heralded themselves as a bisexual activist magician, and they use magic to educate people about gender and sexuality. It was amazing. And I was like, "Well, that's great, but also, why stop there? Why not hire more magicians?" So then I'm moving out of my house pretty soon, the pandemic is sort of ish winding down, and I realized I haven't really been able to have a party in my house and meet my neighbors and do normal neighborhoody things because it was such a weird pandemic year.

0:17:10.8 NA: So I threw a 4th of July party a couple of days ago, and hired this couple, and they're kind of like a magic acrobat circus troupe. So I invited the entire neighborhood, I put invitations in everyone's mail box, I was like, "Hey, we're having a show, 6:00 PM, drop by," whatever, and they did stilt walking and fire spinning and juggling and magic tricks, and people brought all their kids. There was 20 kids there, kids I'd never even seen before, and it was so fun. I'm still on a high from the magic show. And it was amazing to finally meet some neighbors I've never even met before, it felt like a block party. Did I mention the bubble machine?

0:18:02.3 AF: Oh my god.

[laughter]

0:18:05.6 NA: So I've been celebrating hard the last couple of days and my cheeks hurt from smiling so much. It was such a delight, especially coming out of such a rough and emotionally strenuous year to just do something so silly and delightful, so I've decided it's my life's mission to just hire as many magicians as I can possibly afford for the rest of my life.

0:18:34.1 NA: That's great. There's really so...

0:18:35.1 AF: For various activities.

0:18:37.2 NA: Excellent goal. Really support that for you. Yeah, I'm someone who chooses a word of the year, that's a practice of mine, and my word for this year is fun, and...

0:18:47.1 AF: Fun!

0:18:48.1 NA: Part of it for me, I'm quite a serious person, I think I default into more, just a more serious way of being, and there's nothing wrong with that. I don't think that's a problem to be solved, but I need to put a little bit more intentionality around that sort of light-hearted, fun, playful attitude. And it's been nice to just try to cultivate that in small ways, so hiring magicians, something I did not think of, but I will potentially add to my list. Thank you.

0:19:14.0 AF: Yes, hire a magician or watch magic shows, you can watch them on YouTube or whatever, there might be a magician in your neighborhood who's doing a show at a coffee shop, they're everywhere, and I support magicians.

0:19:28.0 NA: That's great. That's great. That's our takeaway today. Everyone go hire a magician.

0:19:32.9 AF: Go support your local... Look, it hasn't been an easy time to be a traveling circus performer or magician, so let's show them some love and support your economy by hiring magicians.

0:19:46.0 NA: So six years ago, when you were the very first guest on this podcast...

0:19:51.2 AF: Oh my gosh, has it been six years?

0:19:52.9 NA: It has been six years, which is very wild. So much has changed in both of our lives in those six years, but I wanted to start by asking you about something that has stayed the same, you've been off social media that whole time, right?

0:20:09.3 AF: Yeah, I think so. Yeah, I guess it was around six or seven years ago that I deleted all of my social media accounts and you know, I think at the beginning, and honestly still to this day, I never viewed it as a black or white all or nothing permanent decision, I just sort of felt like social media has taken over my life, it feels exhausting, I don't like how it makes me feel, it feels like it's holding me back more than it's helping me, it feels like a distraction, so I decided to just take a temporary break for a summer to see how it would feel to live and work without the distraction of social media in my life, and I felt amazing. And so then a summer turned into half a year and half a year turned into a year, and then I sort of realized like, "Well, I guess this is just what I'm doing now," so I officially deactivated all my accounts, but I kind of always viewed it as an experiment like never say never, nothing is forever. Who knows, maybe in a few years there'll be some new social media platform and I'm like, "You know, that one actually sounds really cool or I think I wanna use that one." I'm open to potentially using social media again if it feels right, but for the last six, seven years, it just hasn't felt right, I haven't felt the need for it, and it feels pretty great to not have that be a piece of my life. Yeah, so that stayed the same for these last six years.

0:21:45.0 NA: Yeah. Well, you, I'm interested in going back to the beginning of that a little bit, I know you said that it was taking over your life, will you talk a little bit more specifically about like, was there a moment or a day or something where you were like, I just cannot with this anymore,

what made you decide that the experiment was more worth it than not, 'cause I imagine you had some fears or concerns about doing it?

0:22:06.6 AF: Yeah, there were a couple of moments, actually, it wasn't just one, but there were a series of things that happened in succession that brought me to that point of something needs to change and they were... Well, there was one instance where I was jogging, I was running in downtown Portland where I lived at the time, back when we both used to live in Oregon, and I was running distractedly, I was like doing nothing where you're kind of jogging, but you're sort of looking at your phone and then you come to a stop light and then you're scrolling to pick a new song on Spotify, and then you're jogging, and then you stop and take a photo. I was running, exercising, but just in such a distracted way and kinda glancing at my phone every other second, taking a photo to post on Instagram to show my followers like look at me running or... That kinda thing. And I almost got hit by a train. I almost got hit by that, I think it's called the... Not the light rail, the... I'm blanking on what it's called, but that train that goes through downtown Portland commuter train, I literally just kind of absent mindedly jogged very close to the tracks and almost got hit by the train and I jumped out of the way just in the nick of time and my heart was pounding and I was like, my adrenalin was pounding.

0:23:32.4 AF: And the first thought that later my mind was if I got killed by a train, because I was looking at Instagram like my mom would kill me, even though I'd already be dead, she'd killed me again, and I just felt so embarrassed and like, what the... Who have I become? At that moment, I kind of realized like, wow, this is not just a distraction, it's actually harming my life. My relationship with social media. So that happened, and that was a wake-up call. And I wish I could say after that moment, I logged out of Instagram forever and that was that, but no, that was just sort of the first in a series of wake-up call moments. Another was what I now refer to as the muffin incident. The muffin incident was, it was the 4th of July actually, it was the 4th of July, must have been six or seven years ago. And I bought this huge blueberry muffin and it was like the size of my face, and I thought it was hilarious, and there was something, and I wanted to put a caption on Instagram showing the muffin, the side of my face and write some kind of witty caption about like, This is America, Happy 4th of July.

0:24:47.5 AF: To me, it was hilarious at the time, and I was doing that thing where I was trying to get the perfect selfie of me with the muffin, and I must have taken like 300 photos of me and that muffin to try to get the perfect, perfect shot. And I kind of fell into that stupor where you don't realize how much time is passing, but suddenly you blink and you look up and it's like two hours later and you're still taking photos of your face and a muffin, and that's what happened. And then I remember I came inside and Brandon, who was my partner at the time, he had kind of been watching all of this happening, I was out on the balcony, and I came inside and he was like, "You've been out there for like 90 minutes, like, what is happening? What are you doing?" And I was like, "Really?" And he was like, "Yeah, it's been like 90 minutes with you and that muffin," and we kind of laughed about it, but that was another moment where I was like, I just spent 90 minutes of my life, of my one and only precious life, taking photos of my face and a muffin, so that I can post a sort of vaguely witty caption on Instagram, so that hopefully some people will click a button of a heart so that then I will have self-esteem. And I just was like, "Huh, that... Does that sound good?"

That's not the way I want to live, or the person I wanna be," and it was sort of funny, but not funny at the same time.

0:26:28.7 NA: Oh, my God, I'm literally crying. It's like this deep dark humor though, it's so funny because it's so relatable like that, where you go into that hole where you don't realize just how much time has gone by, I didn't realize it until I started putting the limits, like the iPhone lets you limit how much time, the little thing pops up, you have done your limit of amount of time on Instagram time, and I'm like, "Oh my God, already," like that.

0:26:55.6 AF: Yeah.

0:26:56.5 NA: Yeah. Oh my God, anyway. Continue with that story. Really it like breaks me.

0:27:01.7 AF: Yeah. Oh my gosh. So then after that, well, then I started to get curious about time and how... 'cause I had no... I was like, "How much time am I spending on social media? Every day, every week," I had no concept of it. It kind of just blurred into my life, and so I sat down one day with a calculator because I wanted to figure out the time, and so I kinda looked at just Twitter. I was actually active on several platforms, but I looked at Twitter as one example, and on Twitter, you can see how many tweets you've twitted in the last year or whatever, so I looked, whatever number it was, like 300, whatever tweets, and then I guesstimated like, "Okay, well how much time goes into writing, editing, posting, tracking each individual tweet," and I guesstimated, it was like around 10 to 12 minutes per tweet, if you figure like, "Okay, it takes me a couple of minutes to write it, then I gotta shorten it, then I gotta auto-link, then I gotta post-it, and then I gotta check and see who retweeted it, then I gotta check and see who commented," da-da-da-da.

0:28:13.0 AF: So I guesstimated like about 12 minutes per tweet, so then I multiplied 12 minutes by the number of tweets in the last year to figure out how much time I had spent on Twitter in the last year, and then I multiplied that by the next... By like 40, I think, 'cause I wanted to see if I continue using Twitter at my current rate for the rest of my life like until I'm in my 70s, what's the grand total? Like what's the grand total amount of that will have gone into Twitter? And when I did the math, it was like 3.1 years, and that was a real wake-up call moment. I remember feeling like, that can't be right, I must have done the math wrong, so I went and did it again, but it was correct. All of that time, 10 minutes here, 20 minutes there, 90 minutes there. It all adds up. And then seeing that number like three years... Three years of my life, and that's just Twitter, not even counting Instagram, Facebook, Google, or all the other platforms. I really felt nauseated, I felt kind of dizzy and sick, and that was really the pivotal moment where it was kind of like my rock bottom moment in a sense, where I realized, I'm not okay with this.

0:29:46.0 AF: I'm not okay spending three years of my life on Twitter, and then I was ready, I was ready to make a change. And that was the final motivation to take a break, cutback, and then eventually remove social media altogether because that's what felt right for me. Yeah, those were a couple of the moments along the way.

0:30:09.5 NA: Yeah, I really appreciate you telling these stories. 'cause I think there's... There's

something that I have experienced with various kinds of life changes, whether it was quitting drinking or anything else, where it's usually it doesn't happen all at once, like a light switch, sometimes it does, but I think that it's usually a combination of things, like you mentioned that kind of sit in the back of your mind and you're thinking about it, and it's for me, the point where the pain of staying the same becomes out, like starts to outweigh whatever the fears I have of making the change.

0:30:41.1 AF: Yeah.

0:30:43.0 NA: And unfortunately, I have found that I can't fake that like if I'm not ready to make the change yet I'm not ready, and that's oftentimes where I see someone else doing something where I think, "Oh, that's a change I might like to make, or an experiment I might like to try." Sometimes the truth is, I'm just not ready yet. Like I'm not that you have to be in pain to change as we were talking about earlier, but sometimes with some of these harder, really ingrained, maybe even addictive habits, I do have to get to the point where I'm like, this, it's too painful. I am willing to take the risk to change.

0:31:14.5 AF: Yeah, absolutely. And that's exactly what happened for me. There was the anecdotes that I just mentioned, and then probably a dozen other things as well, little moments. So yeah, like you said, it wasn't a change that happened all at once, like a light switch, it was more like a slow realization over the course of several months that eventually led to that point of feeling like enough is enough, and this isn't the person I wanna be, this isn't what I want my life to be like. And then being ready, being ready to do something about it.

0:31:47.7 NA: Yeah, a phrase that I have gotten from you and your writing over the years is this idea of life minutes, like how do you wanna spend your life minutes, and that story that you told of literally calculating out the minutes is such a good representation of that, but I'll often think about that, not just with social media, but with anything else, like is this really how I wanna be spending my life minutes, they are numbered, I'm gonna die and I don't know when, like I'm actually gonna die, and I'm gonna waste life minutes like comparing myself to some stranger on the internet like, no, thank you.

0:32:15.0 AF: No, thanks. Yeah, I forget what the number is. The average number of life minutes, the average number of minutes that someone's alive, you can figure it out, multiply age 72 by however many minutes in a year to figure it out, but it is interesting when you think about your life broken into minutes, because you can look at a clock and see one full minute go by and that's a minute you'll never get back, and it's wild how many things we can do kind of on auto-pilot that gobble up, not just a minute or two here or there, but it adds up to months of your life, years of your life, decades of your life sitting in traffic, commuting, on Instagram, things that we really don't wanna be doing and the time adds up.

0:33:01.1 NA: Yeah, okay, so I'm curious how you balance or navigate the fact that everything that you just said is true, but not falling into this sort of panic, time scarcity. Am I making the best use of time? That's definitely something that I struggle with is this...

0:33:20.7 AF: Yeah.

0:33:22.5 NA: It's funny, at the time of this recording, like three and a half weeks into taking anxiety medication for the first time, which thank goodness is working, and I'm feeling so much better than I was, I didn't realize how bad I was feeling until the absence of it, it's like the phantom arm or whatever.

0:33:33.7 AF: Yeah.

0:33:35.1 NA: And one of the presentations of anxiety for me is these obsessive thought loops, particularly about forward projecting into the future or about time scarcity.

0:33:46.6 AF: Yeah.

0:33:47.1 NA: And so maybe that's not something that comes up for you, but I'm interested if there's anything in here that you have found to be helpful of how do you stay really intentional with what you're doing with your life minutes without almost like swinging a pendulum too far, where it's like, "How do I know I'm making the absolute best use of this vacation or whatever?"

0:34:02.2 AF: Right, yeah, no, I totally... I've had major time scarcity moments as well. So, okay, so here's what I've been doing for the last couple of years, that is helping. I recommend making a final 24 Hours list, so basically imagine that you have 24 hours to live. This is it, this is the last day of your life. You've got 24 hours, make a list of what you would most wanna do in that time, and when some people do this exercise, they're like, "I wanna go in a hot air balloon over the south of France," and that's great. If that's true for you, put it down, but most people, when you make your final 24 list, usually you write down things like, hug my child, take my dog for a walk. Be in nature, watch the sunrise, watch the sunset, savour a great meal. Call someone and tell them I love them. It's usually really simple things that you realize you would most wanna do on that final day, and then what I try to do is I just try to incorporate at least a couple of those things into my life every day, and then that way I feel like if today is my last day, which it very well could be, at least I'm attending to, if not everything, like a few of those things that are really important and precious to me, and then that creates a nice balance because in any typical day, like I probably do have to do some work and I probably have to pay some bills and I probably...

0:35:49.1 AF: They're sort of just like adult-ing, getting through life minutiae, that we all have to do, but if I can also leave a little space in my day for those kind of last day of life experiences, then that feeling of time scarcity and time panic and mortality dread starts to dissipate a little bit. At least for me. Does that make sense?

0:36:13.8 NA: Yeah, definitely, yeah. And it's a good reminder too, the same way that you were saying that living in Hawaii is not necessarily what people would think living in Hawaii is, right? That this type of stuff is the same. That it's every moment can't be a peak moment, it's just not... That's not realistic. That's not how life works. And also to your point, that's not even necessarily

what we find most fulfilling, right, it can't all be a hot air balloon over the beach or whatever, and it's these other little things and incorporating them more often, it gives us the feeling.

0:36:45.8 AF: It's little things, right?

0:36:46.4 NA: Yeah.

0:36:46.5 AF: Yeah, like at this point in my life, I never end a phone call with my parents without saying I love you, I always want those to be my last words to them because they could be my last words to them. I watch the sunrise almost every morning, there's little moments in my day that might only take a second or two, or a minute or five, but that make me feel like if this was my last day it would be okay, and I think that that really helps with that feeling of, "Am I using my time wisely?" And then also, I think there's a piece of it that's like... If you get into that mindset of like, "Am I using every single minute to the greatest possible advantage, am I maximizing every single minute of my life?" I think that that gets into almost almost like the hustle culture of needing to maximize every single moment, and I mean, that's just a personal choice, I think, to step away from that and go, "Not every minute of every single day needs to be about excellence and mastery and maximizing and striving, like some moments are just about blowing bubbles in your backyard and watching your dog chase them, or sitting and reading a good book or whatever," Like those moments are just as precious too, but that's kind of just like an internal choice, I think that we each need to make.

0:38:16.7 NA: Yeah, I completely agree with that. I wanna ask you one more thing about social media before we move on, I obviously also... I think anyone who is on social media, thinks about social media, there's like a meta thing there specifically, if you use it both personally and for work, which obviously I know you did and I do, and I feel like the two... When I talk to other people about it, the two hang-ups or fears that come up most often when people think about changing their relationship with social media is like keeping in touch with friends, that sort of like FOMO socialization thing, and then marketing their business, especially if they've built that... Use heavily using social media. I think those are two of the most common concerns. Will you share one or two things from each of those categories, if those are the fears sort of what actually happened for you? And was there anything surprising that came out of it?

0:39:06.8 AF: Yeah, absolutely. Well, I had both of those fears. Absolutely, I definitely felt like if I'm not on social media, will my friends forget about me, will I lose touch with people that I really care about and... I mean, basically just what I decided to do was, okay, I'm not gonna be on Twitter and Facebook and Instagram and all of those places, but I'm gonna connect with people that I care about in other ways, I'm just gonna find other alternatives. If social media didn't exist, what would I do? And so I did other stuff, I would text people, I would call people, I love to catch up with friends and chat on the phone with my headphones while I'm walking my dog, I would send people letters in the mail, I would invite people to visit me and have quality time together, have a trip together. Have a weekend together. Last Christmas, I mailed these beautiful boxes, like holiday gifts to people I care about, and I got so much joy and pleasure from curating those boxes, so I also like contacted everyone I know and got their birthday and put their birthday in my calendar so that I

would remember to at least call or send an audio message or something.

0:40:22.7 AF: So I just did the other stuff, you know I did the other stuff that you can do, to cultivate a friendship, or like I mentioned earlier, I threw, basically threw a block party to connect with my neighbors the other day, and I found that not only did people not forget about me, but I mean, I feel that my relationships grew richer and stronger as a result of connecting in those other ways, and so I feel so blessed to have a community of at least four or five really, really good friends that I could call at 2 in the morning if I was hysterically breaking down, and I know they would be there for me, and that's very powerful and special, so that's what I did with regards to friendships.

0:41:15.4 NA: Yeah, something... There's a parallel that's coming up for me in listening to you sort of for when I quit drinking, my biggest biggest fear was around social stuff there, that so many of my relationships were based around drinking, partying, going out culture. And I felt like, "Oh my gosh, people aren't gonna invite me to stuff, I'm not gonna have friends anymore," and you know, long story short, some of that did happen, but part of what I had to get okay with within myself was accepting that I will miss stuff and that it's still the right choice. Sometimes I think with social media that I get to the point of, "Well, if there's anything that I'm gonna miss, then it's that I have to stay on it," right? And that's not true.

0:41:55.5 AF: Yeah.

0:41:56.5 NA: There are friends, people that I am no longer friends with, and it's been 10 years now that I've been sober, so this is a long time ago, but there are people that aren't in my life anymore, that the relationship didn't make the transition, and there were things that I didn't get invited to in those 10 years either because people were uncomfortable having someone there that wasn't gonna partake or whatever their reasons were, that there was something very comforting for me about not waiting until I had a guarantee that I was never gonna miss out actually like, I am gonna miss stuff and what if that's still okay?

0:42:29.1 AF: Yes, and that's such a great point because FOMO, fear of missing out, whether it's missing out on a party invitation or a client or something like that, I think is the number one... One of the other one reasons why people use social media, even when they don't want to, because of that fear of missing out. The way that I kind of started talking to myself about it was, I came to the realization that there is no possible way that I can know about everything and have every opportunity... Unless I literally read every single newspaper, every single blog, every single podcast, every single social media feed, every single... Unless I somehow became this super human computer machine that could intake all information in the world, every day, then I'm always going to be missing out on something, and that's okay. I don't need to do everything or be everywhere, and there's great joy in editing and simplifying and streamlining your life. And there's that phrase now, JOMO, The Joy of Missing Out. It's actually very joyful, to have less noise in your brain and fewer emails in your inbox and do less and do it more joyfully.

0:43:46.7 AF: And so, yeah, I'm sure I miss out on things occasionally, or I'm a little behind on certain things. I just found out recently, that a couple of friends of mine are producing a beautiful

event in California in a couple of weeks and they've been promoting it on social media, and because I'm not there, I kind of just missed the news. I didn't know that was happening, and that happens occasionally, but it's okay. And what... I'm sure you feel the same, with your decision to stop drinking. What I gain in return, is worth so much more than what I might lose. So, yeah. And that ties into the work side of things as well, people always ask me, because I'm self-employed and I've been self-employed for over 11 years. They ask me, "Well, how do you find clients? How do you find customers? How do you market your services and your books and everything, if you're not using social media?" And just like with the friend thing, social media is... It's one option, it's one way that you can sell your work, but it's by no means, the only way, and there's hundreds of other ways that you can get the word out, about the books and products and services, and art work, and whatever it is you're selling.

0:45:08.2 AF: You can start a podcast, you can start a newsletter, you can send a press release to the media, you can do television appearances, you can buy advertisements, you can throw up grand opening or re-launch party, you can notify friends and family, you can do post cards, you can do flyers, I could go on and on and on. But once you really start brainstorming, I think you realize there are so many options, there's so many ways that I can connect with potential customers and make a sale, and we just forget that. Because social media has become so dominant in our lives, we forget that there's alternatives, there's other options that can be just as effective, if not more so. And so, that's what I've done, that's what I've focused on for the last six or seven years, and it's been great. It's been working, and I think what I've realized about social media, is that it's optional, that's it. If you love it and you wanna use it, and it brings something beautiful into your life, that's awesome. Absolutely use it, and it can be used to do so many great things. But if it doesn't feel good, then you don't have to.

0:46:24.2 AF: And there's... Just like you don't have to drink alcohol and you don't have to buy a house, and you don't have to have children or whatever else, there's always alternatives, if you're open to it.

0:46:37.8 NA: Yeah, I love that reminder, and I loved what you said earlier too, about treating it like an experiment. I approach my life and particularly my business, that way as well. Almost because it takes some of the pressure off emotionally, I have a really hard time making a decision if I feel like, "And now I have to do this forever," or "Now I am this person forever," because also that's probably not true, we're constantly changing and evolving. And holding things with a looser grasp, having a little bit more of a playful attitude, even if I am still on Instagram, that's my only social media left, but I was really clear, I took a sabbatical last summer, a little bit of time off work, which was the first real solid time I had taken off work in 15 years, which could be a whole other conversation, about rest and overworking and over-giving, but one of the things that became really clear to me, is that I understand the things that I enjoy Instagram for, but that I don't want my livelihood to be even remotely dependent on it. And so, do I sometimes make more money because I have it? Yes.

0:47:40.0 NA: But I'm also doing a lot of those other things that you mentioned, and it was a cool creative exercise of, "Okay, if I'm not willing to have Instagram be the portal to making money,

could I start to experiment with some of these other things and see how they work, even while still having Instagram?" And it's again, opening up more space around... It's not necessarily like you use the thing all the time or you never use the thing, it's that black and white mindset, it could be so many different shades in between and so many different options.

0:48:08.9 AF: Totally, yeah, and I love that. That's always what I encourage people to think about is, if you wanna use social media, if you wanna include it as part of your personal life or your professional life or both, that's great. And just do it in a way that feels good to you and do it intentionally, decide in what ways you wanna use it and when and how much, and set boundaries, instead of having it become this thing that, like me and the muffin story, just starts to engulf your life and gobble up so much of your time, in a way that doesn't feel good. There's always a middle way, if you wanna do that. Absolutely.

0:48:43.9 NA: So I know that you have been on quite a significant money journey for the last year or so, with some attitude shifts and other things. I love talking about money, so I'm glad that you are open to digging into this. What's a good place for us to start, in this conversation?

0:49:03.0 AF: Oh, oh man. Yeah, I have definitely been on a big money journey, and it's really kind of similar to the social media stuff, it wasn't just one thing, it didn't change all at once, it was kind of a succession of things that had been brewing and percolating in the background, and that kind of really escalated, I guess, last year. So about maybe five years ago, I hired... For the very first time, I hired a money coach. She's wonderful. She's based in Portland. Megan, maybe I can give you her info for the show notes. And I hired her because at that time, I felt like I was... I felt like my relationship with money had gotten way out of wack. I had accumulated a lot of debt, I felt super ashamed about it, I had been devoting a ton of my time and energy into helping my partner at the time, to grow his business. I'd basically been working for him for free, as a free employee because I wanted to help him succeed, and I had been neglecting my own career in the process, and I had just gotten into this place, where I felt like I had tons of debt, my income was way lower than it had been in a while, I felt really stressed out, I felt ashamed, I felt overwhelmed, I just felt horrible in relation to money. And so I was in a real...

0:50:30.9 AF: I realized I need help, I need to help in some way, to get things back on track. So I hired her and we worked together for about a year, and I think we met maybe once or twice a month, I can't remember exactly. But what she really helped me with, she had such a gentle spirit, and she basically said, "It's time to start looking at your money. You need to bring attention to your money and be willing to look at your money and not just bury your head in the sand. And even if it's so uncomfortable to log in and look at your credit card balance or look at your checking account balance, or even if it makes your stomach turn, little by little by little, you need to start looking at it and turning attention towards it again."

0:51:27.8 AF: And so, in such a gentle way, she helped me start doing that. And literally one of our first sessions, the only thing we did was log in to look at my credit card balance, and I was crying, it was that uncomfortable and scary. But little by little by little, she helped me realize that, bringing awareness and attention and being willing to look at the thing, dead in the eyes, as scary as it is, is

also the most powerful thing. And she helped me to change my attitude from, "Oh my God. How did I get myself into this hole that I'm never gonna be able to climb out of?" To an attitude that sounded more like, "Okay, this is not great, but I have the power to get things back on track, and it might take a year, it might take five years, but I can get things moving in the direction I want."

0:52:25.9 AF: And that was a very powerful attitude shift that started to turn the river in another direction. So that was about maybe five years ago, that all that was going on. I made some significant improvements, things started to kinda just really balance out and then I went through the most catastrophic break up of my life. You'll remember, you were there, you were my friend during that time. And it was horrendous on every level, emotionally, financially, we sold our house, I moved to another state. There was about a year, where I was in such a state of grief and depression, that it was so hard to work and just to... I had so little energy, to just do... Basically, I could only do the absolute bare minimum. And so, I just kind of decided, "You know what, I'm not in a good place, and my focus right now, needs to be on my mental health and rebuilding my self-esteem. And if that means that I just kind of coast for a year and don't really focus on earning and improving my financial situation, that's okay. I'm just gonna do bare minimum that I need to do, to pay my rent and get through this year and get myself together, and that's okay."

0:53:51.2 AF: So I kind of gave myself permission to do that. But then coming out of that year and as I started to feel stronger again, things started to shift. And then I connected with a couple of different people who were each kind of little money teachers in different ways. Probably one of the most significant was a woman named Rachel, Rachel Rogers, she became a friend and also a client of mine. She hired me to do some copywriting for her company. And she is one of the most inspirational people I've ever met, when it comes to money. She came... She's a black woman, she's a mother of four kids, she's a self-made millionaire, she is... She had her own incredible money journey, coming from not a lot of money, to having major student loan debt, to starting a business, to eventually growing a company that now employees like 20 or 30 people. And so, she also hired me to help coach her, while she worked on her first book. And her first book is called *We Should all be Millionaires*, and it's a book particularly written for women and people of color and queer folks and other people who are not usually centered in the conversation about wealth.

0:55:16.4 AF: So really, it's funny, it's like... This is kind of clicking as I'm talking about it, the process of working with Rachel, as she wrote that book, basically, she would write a chapter and then she would send it to me and I would read it and I would send back feedback, and then she would write the next chapter and send it to me, and then I'd read it. We kinda worked like that. It basically, selfishly, I felt like I was getting a master class in reconstructing my entire attitude about money. And so many times, I told her, "I can't believe you're paying me. I feel like I should be paying you for the privilege of getting to go on this journey." And by the time that project was complete, I had a whole different attitude about money, and probably the biggest shift... The biggest shifts that happened for me were, I began to see me as a woman, as a queer woman, for that matter, I began to see me earning more money and building wealth, as a political statement in a way, where we live in a world where out of all the women who start businesses every year, most of them close, most of them struggle financially, and only 2% ever reach seven figures in annual revenue, a very, very small...

0:56:40.1 AF: And we also live in a world, where men are three or four times more likely to become millionaires, where... Men are so far ahead in so many ways, financially and for so many reasons, and I began to realize, "Wow, if I can earn more money, then I can do even more good in the world, and I can also be a role model and demonstrate what's possible, and I can build a company that now provides wonderful employment for people," and I began to just create just a bigger vision for my life and the kind of impact that I could have. You can absolutely have a huge impact on the world even if you have no money, but you can have a different kind of impact if you got some money. And so, I began to see things through that lens.

0:57:37.1 AF: And then the other really big shift that Rachel and her work imparted to me, was this idea that I am capable of earning more money whenever I want to, or need to, period. I have that capacity. I may choose not to exercise that capacity, I may choose, "Well, it's not my priority right now," and that is totally okay. But whenever I want to turn on the money faucet, I have that capacity. If I wanna generate an extra \$2000, an extra \$10000, an extra \$45000, whenever I want to or need to, I can't do it. And that was... That alone, was a huge revelatory attitude shift and so empowering, and something that spills over into other areas of life, not just financial, that realization of, "If I really want to or need to, I can. There's always a way." So I could go on and on. I recommend everybody read that book. It's wonderful and very unique and special. But since then, I've been on a different path.

0:58:49.8 AF: I've decided that I want to grow my company to a million dollars in revenue and above, I've hired employees, I have a team now, that's something I never had before. I'm so excited to build a company culture, where eventually, we have profit sharing and free mental health services and wonderful things that I can provide, to change lives. To change lives not just of our customers, but of our team members. I also have a different vision for myself, personally. I wanna own real estate, I wanna build a house where my parents can live when they're older, I wanna be able to take care of them. I want to... I want more, I want more than just paying my bills and paying my taxes and kind of scooting into the next year and just sort of making it. I want more for myself and for all the people I care about. So that's a quick nutshell summary of the journey that I've been on.

1:00:02.0 NA: Yeah. I find it really helpful, to hear you say that you want more. There's something about that, that I was certainly not raised to think that it was okay to say that, particularly when it comes to money, and I feel like my own money journey, we're always somewhere on the journey, but is really looking at a history of under-earning and over-giving and making myself too available to people. It's just been a really interesting... I mentioned, last summer, taking some time off work and there's definitely been, in the last year, a lot of unpacking, around hustle culture and productivity, toxic productivity and productivity addiction and worthiness being attached to busyness, and all of that obviously then goes into the money side of things as well.

1:00:55.0 NA: And sort of for me, really recognizing that I feel like when I graduated college and turned down the work a more traditional job track on purpose, to kinda do this seasonal employment, more creative stuff, patching things together, self-employment that I've been doing it, for my entire adult life, I felt like I was making a choice, to have the autonomy and the time

freedom and more of the creative freedom. And the price of admission, to have that, was financial instability, not having good health insurance, all these things. And there was... I was... Yeah, I was like 22, 21, 22 when I made that decision, and I didn't realize until the last year, how foundational... I just accepted that that was true. It is either one or the other. You either work in a career path that you don't really like, where someone owns all of your time, but financially, your needs are met and you're taken care of. Or you do this thing that you wanna do, but you're always just gonna be surviving and not thriving. And it's been a really interesting process, of being like, "Hang on," sort of like what we were talking about before, it's not just the black or white thing. "What if that thing that I decided was true, isn't actually true, and I can do work that I enjoy and I can also earn enough money, to have housing and healthcare and some adventures and that type of stuff?"

1:02:16.5 NA: And so, it's been... I'm still very deep in it right now and really looking at the roots of this, but I'm super grateful for you telling... I know it was just a snapshot of your story, but looking at these moments in our lives, do we decide, "Actually, I do want more. And that that's okay and doesn't make me a bad person." And having to sort of look at what our associations are with money, with wealth, with time, all of this stuff, is so deeply rooted and has so much to do with not just culture, but what our caregivers and family of origin believed. And it goes so deep, and I feel like all I wanna do these days is talk to people about money. So, thank you.

1:02:50.9 AF: Oh, I know, it's so fascinating, and it is a lot like you just shared. I've done so much of that too. Identifying a belief that you have, and kind of going, "Wait a minute. Is that actually true? It seems like it's true. But is it?" Because so often, there's another way to look at things. Throughout so much of my adult life, as I've been self-employed, up until fairly recently, I was like a lone wolf. I did everything by myself. I updated my own website, I did all my own marketing and sales, I did my... I even prepared my own taxes, I did everything. And my attitude was, "If I hire other people or if I have employees or freelancers, or if I'm managing a team, that's gonna make my life so complicated, and I don't want the responsibility. I can't handle the responsibility of taking care of other people. I can barely take care of myself." That's kind of what I kept telling myself. And so, I kept telling myself, "It's just simpler, if I do everything by myself." And gradually, over the last couple of years, I've realized, there are some beautiful qualities to keeping things really small and just doing everything by yourself, and there's also a cost.

1:04:15.0 AF: There's definitely a cost. There's a cost in terms of, it becomes really difficult to keep growing. Because you're constantly limited by just how much time and energy you have, you always hit a ceiling at a certain point. So little by little, I've been taking baby steps and then eventually bigger steps towards allowing myself to have support, hiring a very, very part-time assistant and then a full-time assistant, and then more people and growing a team and challenging that belief, and realizing that having more responsibility and having more people to manage and take care of can actually be really freeing, and it comes with a cost, but it also comes with so much to gain. And now I'm at a point where I can take Fridays off, I don't have to work every day of the week, and I don't have to stay up till 9:00 PM hitting a deadline. There's so much that I've gained as a result of creating a support team, so... I mean, that's just one example.

1:05:23.1 AF: And of course, I'm not saying like, everybody go hire a bunch of people, but I think

the lesson there is like, look at those beliefs that seem so rock solid, true and question them vigorously. Because you may begin to realize this isn't actually true, or there could be another way or I've been so committed to this, but it doesn't serve me anymore. There's always a way to unravel that and build a new belief system.

1:05:55.2 NA: Yeah, and one of the things that I love... This is particularly easy on social media, but of course it can be done in other ways. When I'm in a period like this where I've identified what a belief is and I'm not necessarily... I don't believe the new thing yet, right? Like, I'm aware of what maybe the limiting story is, or the thing that I'd like to move on from, but I'm nowhere near the point where I actually believe what it is that I wanna believe, something that helps me to close that gap is to find real-life examples of people who are doing that. So whether it's... Okay, for me, I would like to find other solo creative entrepreneurs or people who at least started that way, who are doing more than just financially surviving, and sort of seeing the journey of growth you've been on has been really impactful for me. And just like, almost putting together like a... Kinda like a Board of Directors or an inspiration panel, even if those people don't know that that's the role that they have for you... The same thing happened when I was first getting into long distance hiking, you know, I was not an outdoorsy person at all, had never been camping before, I was in my 30s.

1:06:54.2 NA: And for me, I'm like, Is this something that a woman who grew up as an indoor kid in her 30s can actually get into? And so, I really went on a little rabbit hole journey on Instagram of Let me find other women in their 30s who got into this later in life, or were even older than that, who were now super badass outdoors people, and it was really helpful for me to have these real world examples of, okay, other people are also closing this gap, that maybe I'm not gonna have their exact same experience, but it just helps me to sort of believe that it could be possible for me.

1:07:26.2 AF: Yeah, absolutely, I totally know what you mean. Role models. And having... I mean, if they don't know who you are, that's great, and it's beautiful to have those aspirational role models, but also having friends, having friends and colleagues who are open about talking about money and talking about money goals, who can celebrate with you, and whose attitude can rub off on you and become infectious. Like, I feel so lucky that I have a small circle of three or four people who are also self-employed and who are also very local and proud and excited to talk about money and earning money and wanting more money and what we're gonna do with the money once we get it. I think having those kinds of friends who can rub off on you is so crucial too. You need to like, bathe in that energy.

[chuckle]

1:08:20.6 NA: Yeah, I mean, whatever that adage is that you're the average of the five people you spend the most time with. There is something to that, what it is that you're surrounding yourself with. I'm curious, do you... I don't know how granular you get with your money goals, are you clear on what enough money is for you? Like, what's your relationship with enough-ness and also striving at the same time?

1:08:37.8 AF: Yes, okay. So I have to give a shout out yet again to Rachel Rodgers, because she

taught me this exercise, it's in her book, and she has written about it many times. But here's how I figured out what enough means for me. So what you do is you make a list of what your absolute dream life would include, like, whatever that means for you, it's gonna be totally different for every person. And so, for me, it's like, I wanna have a three-bedroom house in Hawaii, so that I can have my bedroom, a guest bedroom and an office. I want to get massages two to four times a month. I wanna be able to buy healthy produce from the farmers' market. You just make a list of everything that your dream life would include, and here's the thing, you have to really allow yourself to write down exactly what you truly want. You can't be like, "Oh, well, that's a little too much, like no..." Like, you have to allow yourself to really write down. If you wanna get a massage twice a week, if you want a housekeeper once a week, if you want to have meals delivered, whatever you want.

1:09:45.0 AF: Maybe it's none of those things, maybe it's new sneakers or a trip to Bali or whatever, but you write down exactly what you want. And then you do the math, you figure out how much would it cost to have my absolute dream life? And you just Google everything and figure it out to the best estimate that you can. You know, three bedroom house in this neighborhood, my mortgage would be whatever, whatever, or getting groceries delivered once a week would be blah-blah-blah, or whatever it is. You find how much approximately per month would my absolute dream life cost? And then that's your new target. And then you know... And then maybe you add a 10% for incidentals or whatever, but just doing that... I had never done that before, until maybe a year or two ago. I'd always looked at, "Okay, well, how much am I earning right now, and then how can I divvy up that pie to cover my current life?"

1:10:44.0 AF: I had always looked at budgeting in that way, but this is kind of like a whole new way to think about budgeting where you're looking at, "Okay, well, what would it take to get what I really want." And once you figure out that monthly number, it might be more than you're currently earning, it might be less, it might be exactly what you're currently earning and you kinda just didn't realize like, "Wow, I'm kinda doing it." But it's so powerful to find out that number. And so, let's say that you do that exercise and you find your monthly number and you're like, "Whoa, this is like, three times more than I'm currently earning, yikes." Then the next step is, you start brainstorming. What could I do? If I believe that I have the ability to generate more money whenever I want to or need to, then what could I do?

1:11:33.3 AF: And you start brainstorming like, 10, 20, 30, 40, 50 ideas, no matter how big or small, or crazy or wacky or whatever, all the different ways that you could bring that amount of money in the door. And you just start writing down ideas. And sometimes you come up with an idea that never occurred to you before, but... That's something I did about two years ago for the first time, thanks to Rachel, she encouraged me to do that, and it was life-changing. And what I realized is that my dream number was actually not that far up, like, it was more... It was closer than I thought. And it was really exciting to be like, "Wow, well, if I just did X, Y, and Z, I'd be there, I could do this. This isn't as farfetched as maybe I feared." So, that's a really cool exercise to try, and then you can take it in kinda stages, like, maybe you make your absolute dream life, you find your absolute dream life number, it's like, 10 times more than you're currently earning, you're like, "Oh my God, yikes."

1:12:36.2 AF: But then maybe you could go, "Okay, well, what's my attainable dream life for now that can get moving in that direction?" So there could be different phases to this, but that's kinda how I figured out what enough feels like to me.

1:12:49.9 NA: Yeah. I've never done that specifically, but something... I'm a big spreadsheet person, particularly with money-related things, love making spreadsheets, love a good budget. And something that I have is, I essentially made what my budget or spending plan would be per month at different income points. So trying to see a more incremental approach. I just was able last month to give myself a raise for the first time in quite a long time, and being very clear of like, "Okay, what am I excited to put this extra money toward?" And I have a tab in the spreadsheet that's like, "Okay, when I'm able to give myself a raise that's 250 more a month, then that's how I would like to spend it. If it's \$500 more a month, that's where I would like to spend it." And of course, maybe I'll change my mind on those things, but I've been finding it really helpful to have these incremental... That it's not like all of a sudden I have to be making four times as much, you know?

1:13:46.9 AF: Yeah.

1:13:48.1 NA: And having those incremental things. But a through line that's coming up in a lot of what you're sharing, both when you were talking about sitting with the money coach and looking at your credit card statement and crying, but that being something that was really transformative and then again, doing this exercise of how much does my dream life actually cost? The through line is telling yourself the truth. Like, telling yourself the truth about where you actually are with as little judgment as possible. Like, of course, we do have guilt, we do have shame, but letting that all be present and being willing to sit with what's true and hopefully not weaponize the truth against yourself. And then also, being able to sit with the truth of maybe how big your ambition is, or the truth of what your desires are, and being able to hold all of that truth at the same time, I think there's something about just doing that even if you don't change anything, being able to... I mean, so much of my work is around this idea of having honest conversations with yourself, there's something really impactful about, this is what's true for me right now.

1:14:42.2 AF: Yes.

1:14:43.1 NA: And just letting it sit there.

1:14:46.3 AF: Totally, yeah, that is the crux of it. It's just being honest about what's going on and what do I really want? And I think what I've realized with me and money is, I want more than I've ever dared to admit to myself in the past. I wanna be the kind of person who can write a \$10,000 check to a cause that I care about and have it be like, no big deal. And I wanna be able to give monthly bonuses to every single person on my team and help them prosper. And I wanna be that person who has a beautiful cottage where relatives can come stay. And I wanna be that person who can take a month off work and have a team in place to take care of customers when I don't want to. I want a lot. And I think that a lot of this journey has been, like you said, getting... Becoming more okay with saying, I want a big life, you know?

1:15:49.5 NA: Yeah.

1:15:50.3 AF: And it's about money, and it's not about money at the same time, but more about just getting honest about what I really want.

1:16:01.2 NA: You mentioned when you were telling kind of the recap money story that you went through a really painful breakup. Are you willing to talk about that a little bit?

1:16:07.7 AF: Oh yeah, we can talk about it, for sure.

1:16:10.2 NA: I guess my first question, when it comes to the actual reality of healing from heartbreak, which obviously is individual to different people, what do you wish the people were more open and honest about? Like, as you were going through that experience, was there anything that you were like, "Fuck man, I wish we talked about X"?

1:16:29.2 AF: Ooh, that's a really good question. You know, I think that when I was going through all of that, it was sort of like... As with any painful event, at first, people are very sympathetic, how are you doing, checking in on you, making sure you're okay, and then of course, time goes on, people move on, life goes on, they move on to other matters, but you're still hurting, you're still in the pit. And I do remember... Although my support network, my friends and family were amazing, but I do remember that there were moments like, maybe a year after I had left that relationship where I was still not okay, and I was still profoundly grieving. And there was a little bit of that attitude from some people in my life of like, "Wait, you're not over it yet? You're not dating yet? Come on, get over it," you know?

[chuckle]

1:17:40.4 AF: And I think one thing that I wish people would understand is just that losing... Every breakup, every divorce is different, and every single journey is different, but there are some breakups and divorces that are more than just losing a relationship. It really does feel like a death. It feels like a death of the life that you had, an identity, a future, a world view even. And for me, it was that, it was that major. And it takes as long as it takes, you know? And I think as a friend, if you know someone who's going through something like that, to just be patient with them and know that not everyone is just gonna snap out of it after three months or a pint of ice cream or whatever. It may take them a long time to really work through all of that and just to be patient. And one of the kind of things that a friend of mine said to me during that time was, there's no rush. And just those... I'm getting emotional thinking about it. But just to have someone say to me, there's no rush, you know?

1:19:01.5 AF: Like, you don't have to just be okay. That was really beautiful and to... Yeah, and to give myself the time that I needed. It took me almost two years before I sort of felt good, [chuckle] like, really. And before I would even remotely consider beginning a new relationship with someone else. So yeah, just time and patience and being patient with yourself, being patient with your friends, if they're grieving, anything. I think the other really big thing I've learned about from that

experience, I was speaking to a friend of mine, and then she did experience a literal death, her husband died in a very horrific and shocking manner, and she didn't have any time to prepare for it, it just happened. And we were talking about grief one day, and she said to me like, she thinks about grief like waves in the ocean. And when it first starts, it can feel like the waves are just constant, like, it's just the wave after wave after wave after wave, you get no reprieve, no relief, no peace, you're just being pummeled by these waves of grief.

1:20:24.6 AF: And then over time, it's like, the waves are still there, and they're still crashing on the shore, but maybe it'll be like a wave, and then several minutes of peace and then another wave, and then a little more time. And as time goes on, it's like, the waves never go away, but the space of time in between each wave gets longer and longer to where eventually you go a whole day before another wave hits and then you go a week, and then you go a month, and then eventually maybe it's a whole year and you feel a big wave, like, on an anniversary of that loss. And then you're okay for another year until another wave hits. But just thinking about grief in that way of like... It's kind of like, when you have a really, really significant loss or death in your life, it's never over, you know? You carry that with you forever, but the waves get farther and farther and farther apart as you grow and heal and grow into your new life. And that was kind of... Just hearing her say that and hearing her be honest about that was really comforting too.

1:21:39.1 AF: Because I think I would... I had been waiting for the day when it would just be over. And it was powerful to realize like, it's never gonna be over. I'm probably gonna feel some degree of sadness and loss about this relationship for the rest of my life, but it won't be as intense and as all-consuming and new things will grow at the same time. So that's my rambling, [chuckle] speaking about me.

1:22:09.5 NA: No, it's beautiful and honest, and this is the thing that I wish that people talked about more, the fact that it's better and it's... Yet it still hurts.

1:22:18.5 AF: Yeah.

1:22:19.3 NA: That... I mean, we love a good redemption story, right? That's the arc of so many movies and so many things, whether it's post breakup and then you're like, "Life is so much better on the other side." We really like these tight, tidy narratives of coming through the other side, which I get why, they're very cathartic. [chuckle] There's something about that that feels great, and yet I don't know that that's always the most realistic thing. And...

1:22:46.3 AF: Yeah.

1:22:47.7 NA: I don't know that... I've been thinking about this over the last couple of years in the context of a friend to breakup, which is also something that we really don't talk about for as much as romantic breakups get a lot of airtime, I think friend breakups don't as much. And something that I've been reflecting on is the real sadness of... One of the things that you lose, either like you said, with a death, or with a breakup of any kind or the end of a relationship is all of the moments and the memories that that other person was the only one who shared them with you, and then once that

person is no longer in your life, it's not that those things didn't happen, of course they did, they're still in your memory, they're still in your heart, but it felt like a real loss to me and like a real grief that so many of these either lovely memories or big memories or whatever, that I no longer had that person to share them with, that it felt like I was losing part of myself.

1:23:39.5 AF: Yeah, yeah. Yeah, I think you summed it up so beautifully, like, it gets better and it still hurts, like, both of those are true. That loss is real. Another really beautiful realization that I've had about grief and loss, this was very shortly after I left that relationship and moved from Oregon to Hawaii, and it was right around the time when one of the volcanoes on the big island of Hawaii was erupting. And it was a major eruption, I mean, it covered roads, it destroyed homes. Like, it was... There was evacuations, it was a whole thing. And I met up with my friend Kanani, and she's lived in Hawaii her whole life, she grew up here, and she was talking about how when the lava first started flowing, it completely destroyed this one beautiful swimming hole that had been just treasured for generations. It was this beautiful swimming hole, people would take their kids, their grandkids. Like it was a beloved part of the island and the lava just devoured it. Covered it up. It was gone forever.

1:25:00.8 AF: And she felt such a loss. I mean, it was like the neighborhood was gone practically. But once the lava cooled and things settled down and kinda the dust settled, so to speak, that volcanic eruption had actually... It destroyed that one swimming hole, but it created four new swimming holes. And it also created a black sand beach, like this incredible beach, the youngest beach in the entire world that literally hadn't existed before. And I'm gonna start crying again, but I remember we were talking about sudden change and loss, and death and grief and endings and destruction.

1:25:48.4 AF: And she just said, "You know, I was so sad to lose that one swimming hole, I had so many memories there, with my family. But look, now there's more than before." And just that simple statement of, "There's more than before," was... You can see, it still affects me, and I think about that all the time. And that was so poignant, especially at that moment in my life, as I was freshly grieving the end of that relationship. And when I look at my life today, without question, there's more than before. There's more of everything that I want. There was so much loss and there's more than before, and it still hurts and all of that is true, at the same time.

1:26:52.0 NA: Yeah. It's very much the both and... That holding space for all of those things. Can you share a couple of the specific more than before things. What feels really lovely to you?

1:27:02.6 AF: Well, I think my life in Hawaii is... It's amazing. I live in one of the most beautiful places on Earth. I almost never wear pants or real clothes of any kind. I feel more connected to nature than ever before in my life. There's something about living here, I think, because it's... Partly, it's the weather, partly, it's the culture, but there's... I'm just outside all the time, I feel different, physically, I feel like I've slowed down a lot, but in a really beautiful way, there's so much more space in my life, I take more time to... I take more time off, I take more vacations, I take Fridays off, I have a slow morning, I don't usually even start work until nine or 10:00, my whole pace of life has changed. I feel closer to my family than ever before, I feel closer to a lot of friends. I feel...

Certainly, creatively and professionally, I've flourished in the last couple of years, in so many ways, writing new books and starting new projects, and I think also... I'm in a new relationship now, which is beautiful, and I'm so different in this relationship, than I was in my last one. I'm so much more...

1:28:42.8 NA: Tell me more.

1:28:42.8 AF: Oh, yeah. Well, for one thing, I have the attitude now, of, "I want to have a life partner, I want to spend my entire life with someone, I want that journey," and at the same time, I also recognize that nothing is forever, and promises are beautiful, and it's lovely to hear, "I wanna marry you, I wanna be with you forever," etcetera, etcetera, and it's beautiful and sweet, and you never fucking know. People change their mind. People have a change of heart. Things happen. So I think my whole attitude, going into this relationship, has been, "I'm gonna do everything within my power, to cultivate something that lasts a lifetime, and we'll see." You just don't know. And so, that's a huge attitude change that's very different than how I felt in the past. And just the level of honesty, I think, because I went through such a massive heartbreak, in a way, it kind of just leveled me and I got to this place of, "Fuck it, I have nothing to lose. I've already gone through the worst romantic heartbreak imaginable. So whatever."

1:30:13.9 AF: So, with this new relationship, if I'm stressed about money, if I'm having sexual issues, if I'm this, if I'm that, whatever is going on, I am just completely honest, and I think I am honest because I'm not afraid anymore, I'm not afraid that they'll leave me, I've gone through all that and I lived, and if I needed to, I could do it again. So there's just sort of a whole different attitude, about all of that. And different priorities too, I think that... I think, in the past, like most people, I would get very swept up in the romantic intoxication phase, of, "Oh my gosh, she has the most beautiful eyes," or, "Oh my God, his abs." I would get very, very swept up in physical beauty and that rush of oxytocin at the beginning of a relationship and be willing to overlook a lot of issues. I don't know, the fact that maybe they don't treat me that well, but they're so tall.

[laughter]

1:31:31.7 AF: And so, I think, going into this current relationship that I'm in, I just had a whole different set of priorities. My priorities were, feeling cherished and feeling really loved and having someone who shared my values and my vision of the future, and who had emotional intelligence. When my current partner told me that he sees a therapist every week, not because he's working on anything in particular, but because he just wants to have a good relationship with a therapist, in case he needs that support at some point in the future, I was like, "Hello, that's amazing."

1:32:16.4 AF: Just being with someone who prioritizes mental health and emotional health and who's not afraid of dealing with difficult emotions. These are the things that are really important to me, at this stage. So all of this to say, when I was going through my horrible break up and feeling so grief stricken and really feeling truly like I am never going to experience love again, it's just not possible for me. I remember my brother who had gone through his own divorce, and was sort of like a wise sage to me. I remember telling him, "I'm never gonna be the same. I'm never gonna be

the same. My heart is broken. I'll never trust someone again. I'll never... I'm just never gonna be the same." And he said to me, "You're right, you won't. And that's a good thing." And that was another huge lesson of all that grief is, "I am not the same person, I have been reshaped as a result of all of this, and it's actually been a very good thing," and I feel it just clarified a lot of things and set me up for what I hope will be the most successful and healthiest relationship of my life.

1:33:37.8 NA: I hope that for you too.

1:33:38.3 AF: Thank you.

1:33:42.0 NA: Yeah, I was nodding furiously, as you were describing a lot of those things, particularly what you said about not putting too much... Not faith, but not putting too much faith in promises, that it's really lovely, to believe that something is forever, and that's exactly how I felt after getting divorced, and obviously, our experiences of ending relationships... It's funny, it was right around the same time, but they were quite different, my experience and your experience. But a lot of the lessons, it sounds like were the same, or a lot of the takeaways for me. And I'm in this interesting period right now, of really thinking about what marriage means to me, and if that's something I would be interested in again, and if so, why and if not why, and really just staying curious about what all of that is. And I'm enjoying the curiosity of it and really pausing and thinking a lot more deeply about it, but then I did before I even got married.

1:34:38.2 AF: Yeah, isn't that funny? Yeah, same. And also too, I think, going through all of that break-up stuff, and I'm sure this has been true for you as well, it was also a good opportunity to take some personal responsibility as well, and to really look at myself and go, "In what ways did I contribute, to the demise of this relationship?" and because there was plenty for me to take responsibility for, and then to try to use that, to make sure that I am mindful of those patterns and habits and that I don't allow that history to repeat itself in my next relationship. And I think that's why, for me, taking two years of being single and celibate and really trying to get to the crux of, "What just happened? Why did it happen? What did I learn and what can I carry forward?" It really took me some time to get that education, I guess. And I know everyone's different, and for some people, they only need a month before they bounce back into dating or meet someone special or whatever, and that's great. But for all of you all out there who feel like, "I'm not ready yet, I need more time," I just wanna say, "You take your time, take five years, take whatever, whatever you need," 'cause we all grieve at our own pace.

1:36:03.9 NA: Yeah, and there's no perfect or right timeline. On sort of the other side of it, I got into a new relationship really quickly and I had a lot of sort of guilt and self-judgement about that. I should be taking more time. Or what is the experience of starting a new relationship, while still grieving an old relationship? And your words feel just as true, for someone in my situation of, we're all on our own timeline, and I think I really appreciate what you shared about your learnings about grief through this. And it's helping me sort of, I guess, contextualize what one of mine was. I think, because my situation... In the end, it was probably the best divorce of all time. All things considered, all the things that people can do to each other terribly during a divorce proceedings, none of that happened, and we're still incredibly good friends, chosen family. I'm in his house right

now, and I think there was an element, because it wasn't outwardly that bad, not that people weren't supportive, but when you said a lot of people were checking on you, that kind of thing, I didn't really have that, because I wasn't falling apart in that really classic sobbing on the couch, eating ice cream, rom-com type of way.

1:37:10.1 NA: And we successfully lived together for months, after deciding to get divorced, and one of the things... But I was still incredibly sad. It was the right decision, and I was still incredibly sad and it took a lot to get over it, and a takeaway for me was like, "Oh, I shouldn't..." As far as how I approach other people's grief and holding space for other people, it doesn't have to be a catastrophic death, where they're not allowed to be really sad. Grief comes from so many different things. It can come from the end of a particular career path or identity, or there's so many things that cause so many different types of grief, and it's like we've put on a pedestal, that the only grief that's acceptable, and even that is only acceptable to a certain degree, is death or something really bad. And it really was a learning lesson for me of, "So many of us are grieving so many things all of the time, and can we be more... Can we be softer and more empathetic and more compassionate to each other during all of those different flavors of grief?"

1:38:04.0 AF: Yeah, absolutely, there's so many different flavors. And you're right, it's like everyone is grieving something almost all of the time. Basically, let's be nice to each other. Don't be an asshole. You never know what someone's going through.

1:38:23.0 NA: That's a great place to start to wrap up, don't be an asshole. Is there anything that we haven't covered, that you wanted to share?

1:38:30.0 AF: I don't think so. This has been so beautiful. I'm just so happy that we have this time to catch up, and it just feels like catching up with you, I almost forgot that we were making a podcast.

1:38:40.0 NA: I know, right? Well, since we are making a podcast, if you could leave folks with one call to action, based on the conversation we just had, what would that be? Maybe a question to ask themselves or a small action to take?

1:38:55.5 AF: I would say, turn off your phone, turn off your phone just for an hour, for a morning, for a day, for a weekend, whatever time frame you want, and just rinse out your brain, just give yourself a little peace, away from all the digital screens and all the distractions and pressures and everything, and go see a magic show.

1:39:18.2 NA: Yes, turn off your phone, go see a magic show, give yourself a hug, don't be an asshole. Great lessons and wisdom Alex Franzen.

1:39:27.7 AF: Drink your water.

1:39:28.5 NA: What is... Obviously, not social media, what's the best place for people if they are new to you, to find out more about what you do, your corner of the Internet? You have a wonderful

newsletter. I did a mass un-subscribing of things a couple of months ago, and I'm like, "There's five newsletters that I'm actually excited to open and read," and yours is definitely one of them. So I would recommend that for folks.

1:39:48.4 AF: Yeah, I actually have two websites now, I have my personal website, which is AlexanderFranzen.com, it's just my name, dot com, and then I have my company website. Our company is called Get it Done. So the website is, youcangetitdone.com, and those are the two places to go see books that I'm releasing and courses and all that kind of stuff.

1:40:15.5 NA: I will put links to both of those, in the show notes, Thank you so much, Alex.

1:40:20.5 AF: I like the Get it Done website, because we decided to do little illustrations of jelly fish and octopus, which I'm really into. So go see, you'll see what I mean.

1:40:31.1 NA: Yeah, it's a delight... That whole website's a delightful experience. So, would recommend. We'll put the links in the show notes. Thank you so much.

1:40:39.1 AF: Yay.

1:40:47.3 NA: And that's our show for today. Our music is by Adam Day, who also handles our sound editing. Thanks, Adam, you're the best. And huge thanks again, I can't say this enough, to our Patreon community, for making dishonest conversation this whole entire podcast and so much of my other work, possible. Like my weekly personal essay and discussion thread series on Substack, which is called Good Question. Yep, that is funded by the Patreon community as well. Your monthly funding allows me to keep creating resources and gatherings for folks who crave honest conversations, both with themselves and others, and I fully believe that these conversations can change our lives, our relationships and our world. Maybe that sounds like a lofty goal, but it is one that I believe in, with my whole heart. To join us, just come on over to patreon.com/nicoleantoinette. Our community operates on a shame-free sliding scale, so you can feel good about supporting this work from within your own means. So I'll see you over in the Patreon community. Yes? Hopefully. And until next time, know that you are doing great, you are exactly enough, you are not alone, and I am totally rooting for you.

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