

**EPISODE 164**

[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:33]

**FT:** Welcome back to So Money, everyone. I'm your host Farnoosh Torabi.

Happy Monday. Very excited to share a new interview with Mrs. Money Mustache. They say that behind every great man, there's a great woman; or I should say in partnership with a great man, there is a great woman. That saying definitely rings true when it comes to Mrs. Money Mustache, also known as Simi. Of course she and her husband run the successful Mr. Money Mustache blog which offers people "financial freedom through badassity." It's got a huge following and to this day, my interview with Mr. Money Mustache was my most downloaded episode of all time – how about that?

But, did you know that it was actually his wife, Simi, who originally encouraged him to write a blog and create the name Mr. Money Mustache? Now she has her own blog, Mrs. Money Mustache where she shares her experiences and advice about personal finance. Some of you have actually asked me to invite Simi on the show, so I approached her. She was super humble and says this is actually her first podcast. So, I'm incredibly honored and flattered to have her join us today.

A little bit more about Simi. She believes in simplicity, self-discovery, life-long learning, community and the wisdom that comes with age and experience. Besides the journal that she has kept since the third grade, an assorted [teenage] poetry, she has not written any books. She is not an expert in any one field, but loves to discuss ideas about consumerism, parenthood, creating community and money in our society. Since retiring in 2004, she has discovered that she has a thirst for knowledge, she has spent her retirement because she did also retire early like her husband. She spent that early retirement primarily navigating motherhood. She also started multiple new businesses. Her most recent role is out of obsessive [inaudible] shop owner. Lots to explore with the great Simi, Mrs. Money Mustache. So without any further ado, let's get right to it and give her a warm welcome.

[INTERVIEW]

Simi, welcome to So Money, also known as Mrs. Money Mustache. Really, I'm rolling out the red carpet for you here because when your husband was on, I think to date my most popular podcast. I'm looking forward to you exceeding his podcast in terms of listens. Welcome to So Money.

[00:03:05]

**SA:** Thank you so much. Thanks for having me on.

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**FT:** This is your first podcast, right?

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**SA:** Yes it is.

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**FT:** How are you feeling? What's going on right now?

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**SA:** I'm feeling good. I hope I have some good stuff to contribute.

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**FT:** Definitely. I think we're going to try to get as much out of you as possible. I really wanted to have you on the show. I had Mr. Money on the show and he said to me that you were the one who actually encouraged him to get the URL for the website. You put him to the challenge?

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**SA:** Yes, I did. Ever since I knew Pete – which is his real name by the way – he has always been an outstanding writer, I thought. When we first met ages ago, it was when email have just come out. We lived about five hours apart so he use to email me all the time and I'd email him. His emails were just hilarious. I always told him, “You should go into writing. That's something that you're really good at.” And he always enjoy doing it. Anyway, we were talking about ideas for how to do a money blog that would be interesting and not just your standard money advice. We kind of came up with ideas together and a name, but then he was writing everything up in a Word document, all of his blog posts and finally I was like, “Well, I think you've got enough post to start your blogs.” I just set up a WordPress blog for him because that's my strength, the technology side. I just put it there and there was nothing on it. It was just staring him in the face and I just kept reminding him like, “Hey, you have a blog now. It's public. Maybe you should write something.” Anyway, he started putting his posts on there.

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**FT:** Slowly but surely. Incredible traffic to the site. Why the name Mr. Money Mustache? How did that come about?

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**SA:** It was just through brainstorming.

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**FT:** Because that's genius.

[00:05:22]

**SA:** Yes. We think it's hilarious and obviously, Pete and I – some people hate the name, I think that's stupid.

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**FT:** Well, enough people like it.

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**SA:** I know. I think it stands out and it suits his personality and I think it's perfect. As soon as we thought of it, it stuck.

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**FT:** The two of you have been together for quite a while. You said you started dating right when email just started. So, you've dated yourselves now.

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**SA:** Yes about in 1994.

[00:05:58]

**FT:** You both retired young and of course that's a big part of the Money Mustache message as you know – live simply, you can retire early, live life with your own set of rules. When you first got together though, how much of a conversation was this? Did you always know that together you wanted to more or less retire in your 30's? I'm just really curious if you could take us back a little bit to that time or those moments where you had those conversations and you started planning towards that?

[00:06:35]

**SA:** Yes. Well, when we met we're both 19, so we weren't talking about money at all. We had other things on our mind, I guess. Definitely, Pete was always a frugal person. Some of the things I remember at the beginning is that he wasn't typical in a sense that he never got me

flowers, or he never did the traditional things that men do when they're dating someone new. But what he did do was he'd make me things out of wood.

At first I struggled a little bit sometimes with what you expect from dating somebody, getting little flowers and things like that. He wasn't that type of person and he never was. We had those types of conversations and he kept telling me, "That's not what's important. That doesn't mean that I don't care about you because I don't do those things." I think that was more sort of the types of conversations we were having when we first met. We had a lot of dreams, too, about things that we would do together like big goals, experiences that we would have in buying a house. Pete was always very driven, I guess. He had big dreams. That's what I liked about him. He is very different, very creative, very interesting person. That's what drew me to him, but we didn't necessarily talk specifically about money when we first met.

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**FT:** But Simi, he was also attracted to you. I think that what I'm curious to learn more about is some of this synergy between you and Pete. You said you are very honest to admit that you were kind of taken aback in the beginning a little bit about his out of the box thinking when it comes to showing affection like, "Forget the flowers. I'm going to make you something from hand." Would you say that for a lot of your relationship, it was you more or less agreeing to the lifestyle, or that you are more or less on the same page about a lot of things?

[00:08:46]

**SA:** Well, I would say that we're pretty close. I've always been fairly frugal and good with money, and I grew up in a family where it was important to save – that kind of stuff. I've never been an extravagant kind of person. I've always had a pretty minimal lifestyle, so I think it was just more emotional for me, like I guess just knowing that he liked me. Like on Valentines Day, if you don't get anything, you feel like, "Well, that sucks. All my other friends got something." But eventually I came around to that way of thinking and I think I would have anyway in the end with anybody else just because that's how I was inclined to think anyway.

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**FT:** How would you describe your life together now from a financial standpoint? If you had to describe it to someone – I've heard Pete describe this in his words on the podcast, but I'd love to hear it from your perspective as well. How would you describe your financial life as you've built it with your husband?

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**SA:** I would describe it as easy, I guess. It's not really an issue at all in our life right now. For a long time we talked about finances constantly, but now we just don't really talk about it anymore.

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**FT:** You also retired very young. How did you make that possible? What did you do when you retire so young? I guess also in your 30's, right?

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**SA:** Yes, we both left work at the exact same time.

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**FT:** Work in technology, right? You were also working in engineering?

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**SA:** Yes. I was a software developer and project manager. I left that job and I was doing other things but we didn't have to do it for money. So, I started helping my parents with a business that they wanted to start in the US, but they didn't know how to get going because they didn't have anybody in the US to get it started for them. I helped them for that, which involved figuring out payroll and how to get a business going in the United States and multiple different states. I helped them with that for a while, I also got my real estate license and I started dabbling in that

a little bit. Pete started a house building business so there has been a variety of different things that I've been working on. Also, we had a child so that took up a lot of time.

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**FT:** Right, Mustache Jr.

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**SA:** Yes, right.

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**FT:** How old is he now?

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**SA:** He's nine.

[00:11:33]

**FT:** Oh. I met him because I came to your home in Colorado a few years ago, maybe, and he was really into making music.

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**SA:** Yes.

[00:11:42]

**FT:** Is he still into that?

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**SA:** Oh yes. He loves making music.

[00:11:46]

**FT:** Oh my gosh, that's awesome.

[00:11:49]

**SA:** He's pretty awesome.

[00:11:51]

**FT:** All right. Now, let's talk about your financial philosophy, Simi. What would you say in one sentence is your money mantra and curious to how that maybe has changed since you've experienced the whole early retirement and the success of the Money Mustache blog.

[00:12:11]

**SA:** Yes. I think it's something that has developed over time, just to focus more on internal happiness and being good to the environment. If you really think about what that means, it ends up that you don't end up spending a lot of money because money can bring happiness in some ways, but at some point it doesn't help you in those areas at all.

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**FT:** Yes, you guys are very environmentally-conscious and it's promoted in your neighborhood. It's something that I think helps where you live. You have like-minded community members. What are some other examples of how you guys are being green and saving money at the same time?

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**SA:** Well, we just try to lead by example for our son and that means not driving very much – I think really the key is just having a local lifestyle. If you're living out in the middle of nowhere and then you tell yourself you're not going to drive anywhere, well then you probably aren't very happy because you're not seeing your friends and you're not doing things that you want to do. In our case, we live in a community – on purpose by the way – where everything can be very local. All our friends are nearby and there's a lot of events here. Driving is probably the biggest thing, so we just try to support other environmental organizations as well through donations and things like that.

[00:13:46]

**FT:** When Pete was on the show, I asked him, “You're retired, the blog is successful, you have side gigs, it sounds like you're living off of the income that you saved in your 20's and not saying you flatlined. What are some things that you're enjoying now that you didn't enjoy necessarily 10 years ago because it wasn't either important to you, or you didn't want to spend the money, or you didn't have the money? Is there a splurge?” I ask this usually later in the conversation, but I'm so eager to know now. I want to know. What's Simi's splurge?

[00:14:21]

**SA:** Okay. Well, when you first started talking, I was thinking donating is probably the biggest thing that we're doing now. But as far as a splurge goes, for a while I was doing CrossFit and that's a pretty big splurge because it was about \$120 a month. Unlike Pete, I am externally motivated, so it helps for me to have a group of people that I can work out with and stuff like that. CrossFit, yoga and I'm trying to think of something else, but...

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**FT:** He said sushi.

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**SA:** Oh, yes, sushi. We don't go out to sushi as much as I'd like to. Maybe I should talk to him about that.

[00:15:02]

**FT:** Yes and I would like to be considered the person who helped you guys achieve that.

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**SA:** Yes. Well, definitely food. I mean groceries. We just buy whatever we want. Right now because I'm gluten-free, we're eating a lot more meat than we used to, so we try to get grass-fed, beef and organic kind of good food, sometimes usually from local farms and things like that. We spend more on that kind of stuff because it's important to us. We buy a lot of fancy cheese, olives – yes, food.

[00:15:40]

**FT:** I'm coming over for dinner. That's what's happening.

Well, take us down memory lane a little bit, because I don't really know much about your upbringing. I think you grew up in Canada? I'm sorry for saying Canada, I know that's a whole country. Specifically where and what would you say is your number one financial experience as a kid that as an adult, now you look back and you go, "That taught me a lot and that's probably why I am the way I am today with money."

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**SA:** Yes, that's a good question. Well, I grew up in Ottawa Canada and I have a father who is from India. So, he moved at '70s and met my mother. We never really talked about money as a family. I barely even knew what my parents did for a living. They both came from families that really had nothing. They made something out of nothing. My dad came to Canada from India with not a penny to his name. He worked really, really hard to make a life for us and it was really

important to him to be able to provide for his kids. My mom grew up on a farm in Quebec. Neither of them spoke English, by the way, when they met which is interesting.

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**FT:** It is interesting.

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**SA:** Yes. I learned from them about hard work and accomplishment. From my dad I learned about saving. My parents, what they would argue about is that my mom would be more of a spender and my dad was really concerned about money. So, they would sometimes argue about that and I remember my mom hiding some of her purchases from him – things like that. I'm trying to think of what kind of impression it made upon me. I think that was because of my personality. I'm more like my dad and I'm more of a savings-type, whereas my brother is a bit more like my mom and he's more of a spender. Sometimes I think personality comes into play when it comes to money.

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**FT:** What do your parents think of the Mr. Money Mustache blog?

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**SA:** They think it's cool. We didn't tell them at first and they didn't really know about it. They do follow it and I think that they're interested on all the ideas and they think it's cool.

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**FT:** You blog for your Mrs. Money Mustache.

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**SA:** It's Mrsmonymustache.com and it's its own blog. I have a lot of ideas for it, but I haven't really done much with it unfortunately. I think I'm limited by the fact that I don't feel like I'm really that great of a writer. So, a lot of my ideas don't go on to the page as well as I would like them to.

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**FT:** I disagree first of all.

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**SA:** Have you looked at it?

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**FT:** The little bio that you even just sent me, it was so darling and I was like, "I want to read more about Simi." And you wrote that, I assume.

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**SA:** Yes.

[00:18:50]

**FT:** I read in the intro that you've had a journal since third grade. That's remarkable.

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**SA:** Yes. I've always liked to write and I think it has really helped me in my life to be able to write down how I'm feeling about things and just going through harder times.

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**FT:** It would be so interesting – I'm not saying you do this – but if somebody has a journal from a very young age and now they're in their adulthood, to maybe release a page or a day of that journal every single day, and that's the blog. You pick up from this woman's life when she was eight. Today she's maybe in her late 30s, her 40s and it fast-forward you through her life, maybe release a few days of that time, or a whole year in one gulp. I don't know. But that would be really cool. It could be a movie. Just brainstorming for you.

[00:19:41]

**SA:** Well, I've always wanted to write a book. So, I've thought about using parts of my journal as storyline for a book. But it would be incredibly embarrassing especially the teenage years. I just recently re-read some of it because one of my friends from high school recently passed away and I wanted to look back and see what I've written about her. I couldn't believe how boy-obsessed I was. There's nothing really of substance in there.

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**FT:** How did you and Mr. Money Mustache meet? How did you and Pete meet?

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**SA:** We actually met through an old boyfriend of mine. I was dating this guy and he went off to university and he met Pete there. Pete was coming to Ottawa to come work for the summer and so, we just got all got together. That's how I met him.

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**FT:** What does your journal say about first meeting Pete?

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**SA:** While, actually it's funny that you say that because when I first met him, I remember he was eating his pancake like a pizza – syrup all dripping down the side.

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**FT:** Oh my gosh. That's attractive.

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**SA:** No, it was awesome.

[00:20:58]

**FT:** What would you say, Simi, is your number one financial failure if you ever had one?

[00:21:05]

**SA:** I wouldn't say that I've had any one big failure, but there was a time where I was spending a lot more money just because I had this new job, I was making more money than I ever made in my life and I was buying coffees everyday, books from the bookstore, and Amazon, and just clothing from REI – anyway I was just spending a lot of money and that's when Pete and I had our little talk where he sat me down and we had a discussion about the future, retirement, how we could get there and part of it was me making some big changes.

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**FT:** And how did you take that?

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**SA:** Actually it was pretty exciting to me because he presented it really well, he had the spreadsheet showing me what was possible and how it would be great to not have to work when we have our first child. He also gave me alternatives. Like instead of going to the bookstore, why don't we get a library card? I remember the next day we went to the library and I thought, "Wow, I haven't been to a library since I was a teenager." And I loved it. I think I took

out 20 books that day. Anyway, we also got an espresso machine shortly afterwards so I could make lattes at home. It wasn't necessarily giving things up, it was just thinking of things in a different way.

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**FT:** Awesome. Well, you've had so many wins in your marriage and in your financial life. What would you say is your proudest money moment?

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**SA:** The first thing that comes to mind was when I first started working in Boulder, I had this job that I absolutely loved with great coworkers, but at some point I wanted to travel and I wanted to go back to Australia. Pete and I have planned this 12-week trip and I didn't think that I would be able to take that much time off work. So I remember going in to talk to them about it and kind of saying, "I'm willing to quit if needed." But they let me stay and in fact they created a whole policy about absence from work for 12-week periods, what that means and how it works out. The reason it was such a big money moment for me is because at that point, we were well on our way to early retirement, and our savings, and everything. I felt really confident I could go in there and ask them if I could do this, and I was willing to lose the job over it. I think that if I had been really desperate for money, I wouldn't have had the confidence to go in there and ask for that.

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**FT:** That's amazing. All right, let's talk about rituals. You're obviously a big health nut, so I suspect you have some good habits when it comes to fitness, staying healthy, you're externally motivated – and I am too, I need the community – what would you say is your number one financial habit that helps to keep your status quo. You guys are doing awesome, obviously. You're tribal leaders when it comes to financial fitness. But behind the scenes, what's an activity or a habit that you do that is regular that helps you maintain this success?

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**SA:** I feel like I used to have a lot of habits, but I don't really need them anymore because I don't feel tempted to spend money at all anymore. Just because over time I've just started to feel like I don't need to. But in the past, I used to have limits on how much I could buy – shopping for clothes for instance. I'd have 10 in my cart and I'd have to narrow it down to three before I checked out. Or just kind of little games I would play with myself. Also, I just don't go shopping. That's probably the biggest habit, it's that I don't go shopping at all just for fun. If I need something, I'll usually look it up online and buy it that way.

[00:25:31]

**FT:** Yes, that's a huge change, right? Imagine Farnoosh not going on the internet just because she's bored to shop. Not going on Amazon, not walking into the mall and that I think is something that you grow up with. I think moms and daughters do this as like a bonding thing and moms and sons don't do this, dads and sons don't do this. It's definitely a female ritual and it needs to stop. It's getting in the car and going to the mall with no agenda.

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**SA:** Yes. Actually I was talking to Pete about this yesterday about retail therapy and how it's a really big thing for women. If you're feeling down, or you've had a bad day, a lot of people will go shopping. I think it's in order to make themselves feel better, or better about themselves, or maybe even just to get out of the house and do something. I think that you can easily replace that trigger with a new kind of habit and you can go for a run, or you can meet a friend for coffee, or I feel like anything that I can do that makes me feel better about myself will help me with that same thing that retail therapy may be used to help me with.

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**FT:** Yes, absolutely. Yes, there are so many things you can do that are free, going for a walk. If it means even going and getting a coffee, that's \$3 or \$4 that you spent versus how much more you would have spent at the mall and something that you don't need.

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**SA:** Exactly. Yes.

[00:27:11]

**FT:** Awesome. By the way you live in a great community, a really great climate that helps and New York here which had been a pretty dismal winter. We're just happy now that the sun is out. You're curious to check everyone's bank accounts from November to March and April and see how much they spent online, or maybe vacations they took because they just couldn't take it anymore.

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**SA:** Right. I know. There are some people I know who really embrace that. Like Pete's sister for example who live in Ottawa, which is sort of a terrible climate. Yet, they just go outside all the time, they do outdoor activities and they just come to love the winter. It's amazing how you can really change yourself so that you can start to enjoy that kind of climate. In our case, we just moved.

[00:28:05]

**FT:** There's that. And people did, by the way. There was an article in the New York times about – I live in Brooklyn and specifically some Brooklynners who were like, “LA looks pretty great this time of the year. In fact maybe even for the rest of our lives.” They pack their suitcases and move. That's pretty dramatic.

Well, Simi, you've been such a fun guest. Before I let you go – I don't want to let you go – but before I let you go, I'd love to get your stream of consciousness replies to these So Money fill in the blanks. The point here is that you just finish the sentence quickly, the first thing that comes to your mind and don't overthink it.

[00:28:42]

**SA:** All right.

[00:28:43]

**FT:** If I won the lottery tomorrow – let's say you won oodles of cash, \$100 million – the first thing I would do is?

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**SA:** I would start a foundation, I think.

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**FT:** What kind?

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**SA:** Maybe for money education, or support for women in shelters, something like that. I don't know.

[00:29:05]

**FT:** Yes, that's you being an overnight millionaire. In this case \$100 millionaire.

The one thing that I spend my money on that makes my life easier or better is?

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**SA:** Physical therapy. I'm doing physical therapy right now for my shoulder.

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**FT:** That working out?

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**SA:** That's expensive.

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**FT:** Is it PX90? What was it that you did?

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**SA:** No, I'm doing CrossFit. I'm not doing it right now because my shoulder is...

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**FT:** It's hard on your body, isn't it?

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**SA:** I know. Yes, it can be.

[00:29:38]

**FT:** My biggest guilty pleasure that I spend a lot of money on is?

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**SA:** CrossFit and yoga.

[00:29:46]

**FT:** The one thing I wish I had known about money growing up is?

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**SA:** That it can work for you.

[00:29:53]

**FT:** When I donate money, I like to give to \_\_\_\_\_ because?

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**SA:** I like to give to Women's Shelters because I feel like that's a really important cause. I just can't imagine what it would be like to be a woman who feels like she has no options, or she's scared, or has nowhere to go.

[00:30:19]

**FT:** Yes, absolutely. That's excellent.

And I'm Simi, also known as Mrs. Money Mustache and I'm So Money because?

[00:30:32]

**SA:** I'm So Money because I don't think about money.

[00:30:36]

**FT:** High five. When I first met with my financial planner, she said to me, "Where do you want me to take you? We're going to get your money figured out, we'll get it squared away but how do you want to feel about money and how can I help you get there?" I said, "Honestly, I want to get to a point where I don't have to think about money." She smiled and she said, "Yes, I know that desire and I'm going to help you." This show is all about talking about money, thinking about money, there's also the stress that I think that's really what I was trying to get out. I don't want to have to stress or worry about money in that way. But I love talking about money with you,

thinking about it and strategizing. But yes, it's that worry, it's that anxiety that I'd like to do without.

[00:31:25]

**SA:** Yes. Once you get there, it's so liberating. You have so many options in you. You can help other people. It's just endless possibilities.

[00:31:37]

**FT:** Well, thank you to you and Pete, and the Money Mustache online empire it is for encouraging us. I have to say, my friends don't really know a lot about the work that I do, I don't really talk about work but when I do mention Mr. Money Mustache and Mrs. Money Mustache, my friends who are smart and are financially savvy, they know who you are.

[00:32:03]

**SA:** Oh yes? Good.

[00:32:05]

**FT:** They know. They don't maybe follow all the other news – I have personal friends who are big advocates and fans of your work and so that always makes me feel great. When I met like brunch or dinner with them, I'm like, “Yes, you know, I'm talking to Mrs. Money Mustache next week.” They think that's so cool. They're like I'm talking to a celebrity.

[00:32:24]

**SA:** Awesome. Well, I feel like I'm talking to a celebrity.

[00:32:26]

**FT:** Oh my gosh. Well, Simi, truly, thank you so much for joining the show. I'm so honored this was your first podcast. I hope it was fun for you. I know listeners got a ton and I got a lot of takeaways from this. I really appreciate it and I really want you to bring out Mrsmonnymustache.com and take it the ultimate.

[00:32:48]

**SA:** Yes, maybe I will. I have big plans, I just need to get going on them.

[00:32:53]

**FT:** Well, the audience are there. People have been asking me to interview you for a while now. So, just know that the audience is there, it will be there with open arms and high fives.

[00:33:02]

**SA:** Thank you, Farnoosh.

[00:33:04]

**FT:** You're welcome. Have a great, great day and we hope to have you back.

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**SA:** Thanks.

[END]