

EPISODE 850

“CB: If you were to fail, you have to ask yourself what’s the worst that can happen? For me, when I asked myself that question, what’s the worst thing can happen? I lay out all the things, but it’s like, can you bounce back from this?”

[INTRODUCTION]

[0:00:47.6]

FT: Our guest today is Casanova Brooks, a young man who battled cancer in his teens, lost his home, lost his job and experienced the death of his mother all within the span of one week. Hitting rock bottom, he says gave him the confidence to take on new challenges, take on a growth mindset and rebuild his life.

Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm your host, Farnoosh Torabi. Today is one of those episodes where you're just going to hear the most inspiring story of a man who persevered and now only at the ripe age of 31, has completely rebuilt his life. Casanova today is a successful real estate expert. Get this, he locked in 46 real estate deals in his first year as an agent and this is while working in the new city, he had no family, no friends, no network.

His outlook on life has awarded Casanova invitations to speak all over the world. He's also the author of the book *Real Estate: Play the Game Like the Winners*. We're going to talk about the steps he took after hitting rock bottom, his take on real estate these days, is this a buyer's market, a seller's market, and how to evaluate risk in your financial life.

Here is Casanova Brooks.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:04.5]

FT: Casanova Brooks, welcome to So Money. I love saying your name.

[0:02:08.3]

CB: Thank you. I appreciate it. My mom definitely did me a favor.

[0:02:12.2]

FT: Yeah. Man is she proud of you, looking up from above up above. I mean, gosh. You have done quite well for yourself in just four years. We're going to go back in time a little bit on this interview, because I want to share the breadth of your journey with our listeners and just how impressively you've gone about building your career, building yourself back up. I know that with your mom passing four years ago, that was a real turning point for you. It was within a week where you lost your mom, you lost your home, you lost your job.

Fast-forward to today, you're an award-winning real estate broker agent, you are a speaker, a sought-after speaker, you're doing tons of media, you've written a book, *Real Estate: Play the Game Like the Winners* and you're at the ripe age of 31. I'm celebrating my last year of my 30s. How do you feel right now with given all that you've accomplished in the short period of time?

[0:03:14.7]

CB: Yeah. Well, thank you for the introduction first off. I would say that I feel like the weight of the world is on me. I think once you have it in your mind, once you have it in your heart that you really just want to impact the masses and you want to be the best version of you, it's very hard to sleep a little bit. It's very hard to rest, I should say. Each and every day, I'm just trying to figure out how I could be a better version of myself and how I can keep pushing myself to go forward, because I do have two small children.

My son is now just about to turn eight-years-old, so everyday he's in that stage where he's watching what I'm doing, rather than what I'm saying. I got to make sure that each day I go hard, because I heard that – somebody had said to me one time and they said, “If your wife and your children could follow you around for one day, at the end of that day whatever time that you shut

it down, what would they say about the way that you conduct your day? What would they say about your work ethic?”

Every day, I try to keep that into my mind. If my son followed me around, one day which he has obviously, but just to say, “Wow, dad is really going after it,” or is it like, “Hey, is this really what you do? Then I could just go play Fortnite all day.”

[0:04:28.1] FT: Oh, my gosh. Well, you're someone who has proven time after time to really excel, despite adversity. You had cancer when you were 15 and you spent two years fighting that and eventually went into remission. So happy about that.

[0:04:47.9]

CB: Thank you. Thank you very much.

[0:04:49.4]

FT: Yeah. I mean, there's nothing quite like a health scare, right? To put life in perspective.

[0:04:54.4]

CB: Absolutely. For me, it was different and difficult as well, because growing up I was never one to ever be sick. I never had the chicken pox, measles, anything like that. At 15, when all of a sudden you're playing sports and one day you just find yourself not being able to breathe and you're constantly taking these naps and you're an active boy, or even girl, that's something that's definitely scary in its own.

When the doctors told my mom and grandma that hey, it was more serious and they were going to ship us off to another university, my parents were like, “Hey, what's going on?” They're like, “Well, we think it might be cancer.” From there it was like “Whoa.” I didn't really understand the severance of having cancer. You always hear the word, but for me I hadn't lost anyone that was that close to me and I just wasn't really aware of what that meant.

Obviously, over those next two years through going through lots of treatments and lots of tests and things like that and really not being able to be as active and as social as I wanted to be during my golden days of high school, it really took me leveling up mentally to understanding what I was going through, but understanding as well that it can all be taken any given day from you. You have to live each day to the fullest.

[0:06:09.4]

FT: Do you think that's part of what has fueled you to be so successful? I mean, the first year that you turned to real estate as your career path. This was after doing a bit of soul-searching, you embarked on real estate. You locked in 46 deals in that first year in Omaha. You were just telling you before we were live that the average number of deals for a rookie real estate agent is one or two in the first year. You did 46. There's almost one a week.

I already listed off all of your other incredible accomplishments and I wonder the catalyst for all of that, perhaps was the near-death experience as a cancer survivor at age 15, and then it was losing your mom, and by the way, your house and your job in a short period of time. There is a logic to this a little bit, right? That happened to you and of course, you could have just sulked, right? You could have just been someone who wallowed in their misery, but you turned that around for yourself. Do you feel that was really the tailwind for you?

[0:07:23.2]

CB: Yeah. I would say that for me, I always – when get into something, I'm always thinking to myself that I want to be the best version of me in this thing that I could do, right? It's always rather than having so many fears, I always just want to know can I hit the unknown or the unthinkable? As you were talking about – a lot of people say you got to have patience and four years is not a lot of time. For me, I know that right now I'm someone where my motor runs a 120 miles an hour. I pride myself on that.

I always think to myself, at some point this will slow down. I got to be able to make sure that I give it all that I got, so one day I don't look back and I had any regret. When I first got into the business of real estate, the reason why I got into real estate was because I wanted to be the

lord of my land. Coming from where I come from, my family never owned businesses, never owned cars and they definitely never even owned their own homes. We were moving apartment to apartment.

I came across a video and they were like, “You got to figure out how to be the lord of your land. You got to figure out how you can change this trajectory for the people that are going to come behind you.” That was a big deal for me and I just seen that life was just going so fast and what did I really have to show for it? Everyone had said, you got a lot of potential, but I didn't have a blueprint, and I just wanted to live up to the expectations of my mom, I wanted to live up to the expectations of anybody who believed in me.

I just figured, I would go as hard as I could at anything that I was doing to prove that it's possible. I didn't want to use not having financial backing, or any type of resources as a crutch. I wanted to go hard and show. At the end of the day, I think while I get a lot of praise about the real estate, it's really – real estate is a people business and that's what I love about it. For my whole life, I've just always tried to focus on building meaningful and effective relationships.

If you build the right type of relationships and you have accountability and you communicate well, people know that they can depend on you and you can be successful in anything. That's what I've always just tried to focus on and I believe that that's really the foundation of how I've been able to build what I've built today.

[0:09:36.6]

FT: You're absolutely right about that. I mean, if you're at the end of the day really good at building relationships and connecting with people and nurturing relationships, you can sell real estate, you can sell clothing, you can sell anything, because people trust you, right? It's that implicit trust that comes with not letting people down time and time again.

You sold 46 pieces of real estate in a year. I want to dissect this. I want to unpack this a little bit, because how? How did you do that? You're one person. Was there a hack to doing this? Was it like a block of units in an apartment building? Was it one buyer who bought – from Russia who

bought 20 units? What happened? What do you credit to the magnanimity of all those sales, other than of course your charm.

[0:10:27.4]

CB: Thank you. Well, no. I did no multifamily deals. The only time that I was doing multiple deals with the same buyer is if somebody was listing their property and buying another property. Other than that, no one client that I had in that year did more than two deals, I would say. Even with the investors that I was working with, which were friends that turned investors, because they wanted to get into real estate after we'd sit down and I would tell them the value is in owning the land and owning the real estate, so then they bought a couple properties with me. That's what I would say.

How I did it was really just focusing on branding and focusing on showing up every single day. Now what I mean by that is when you first get into the business of real estate, there's no training. For anywhere that you go, when you first get your license, what they teach you at getting your license in any real estate school for becoming a real estate agent is how to not go in front of the real estate commission, in any state, or any local city, whatever it is.

Then once you get your license you're like, "Oh, my God. Well, what do I do now?" That's why so many people – the National Association of Realtors, which is NAR, the big I guess association that's with real estate agents. Anyway, they said that 87% of all new real estate agents get out of the business within just five years of getting their license, right?

The reason why is because there's no training, there's no support. Even if you just go to a big brokerage, like a Keller Williams, or a Berkshire Hathaway, or any of those brokerages, there's so many agents in there and so many people are just moving so fast that you're like, "I don't want to be a burden to any of these people. I'll try to figure it out." That's why a lot of people they don't go full-time in the real estate, they do the part-time thing so they can allow it to build up over time.

That's very tough to do, because when other agents – it's easy for agents to go at you if you're a part-time agent, because they can tell a seller or even a buyer like, "Hey, do you want someone

who's handling your most prized and biggest investment to be part-time, or do you want somebody that truly knows the market?"

For me, what I was doing every single day was I was trying to line up as many coffee and lunches as I could with anybody and everybody who would sit down with me, because I didn't know anyone in the city. I was sitting down with bankers, I was sitting down with anyone at networking events, I was sitting down with anyone who had influence. I thought that maybe even if that person was not buying a home or selling a home in the next 30 to 60 days, they probably knew somebody.

Again, that just came with me telling people, "Hey, here's the excitement that I have for this business. Here's what I'm doing right now." Then on the backend, it was really a lot about the branding that I was doing. What I mean by that is the average – I want to say the average real estate agent just here in Omaha is probably around 47, 48-years-old. Across the country, I would say it's probably around 50, 51. Now it's getting younger, but those agents aren't really utilizing social media.

Just think back three to four years ago, a lot of them didn't want to utilize social media and some of them still aren't. For me every time, I got someone who bought a house who even and sold a house with me. I was taking pictures with them and they were happy to do so for me, because of how hard I worked. Every time you would get on the Facebook, if we're just friends or even Instagram, or Snapchat, you would see these pictures with someone with the sold sign with Casanova Brooks and his name and his company on it.

After a while, it just became social proof and then I started to get more messages from people saying, "Hey, I see you're selling up everything in the city. Would you be willing to come give me a CMA on my home, or would you be willing to grab coffee with me so you could teach me what I need to do to be in a position to buy a home in the next 30, 60, 90 days?" From there, just kept compounding and I just kept showing how excited that I was.

[0:14:29.4]

FT: I love that. Leveraging a tool that maybe your competitors aren't using yet, that's really smart. Instagram, I know we have had guests on this show like Ryan Serhant, right? For Million Dollar Listing and some of the other stars from those Bravo shows. Truly, they are hustling. They're out there trying to sell every day. They are true real estate agents and they are all big on social media before it was really the normal thing to do. Now everybody is on social media, but you were ahead of the curve and that paid off.

[0:15:06.7]

CB: Yeah, absolutely. Gary V talks about this a lot. You have to have an audience and you have to follow where the attention is. Nowadays, more people are going to Zillow, more people are going to realtor.com, all these different sites and they're watching YouTube videos and they really just want to know whether you're working with them on the investor side or you're working with them on the primary home side. They want to know that they have somebody who's one, going to work hard, but two, knows what they're doing.

The only way that you can show that in today's world because everything is speeding up is to have videos out there, to have content out there to be able to even just give them some sense of direction and then they can say, "Hey, I loved what you said in that last video. Here's my scenario. Would you be able to give me a little bit more information on how you think that I can win?" When you do that, I think that you will win in the end, because you helped serve somebody else.

[0:16:03.7]

FT: You also have Casanova TV, which is great; another way for you to get out there. I have to ask you, because your base – are you still in Omaha?

[0:16:12.6]

CB: I am still in Omaha. Yeah.

[0:16:14.2]

FT: Have you ever run into Warren Buffett at the grocery store?

[0:16:17.6]

CB: I have not. I have a lot of connections to him. A lot of people who I'm very close with are close to him. No, I've never run into Warren yet. Actually, I'd take that back. I've never run in through him in like a grocery store, or a lot of people have just seen him in Dairy Queen, because he has his spots that he just frequent all the time. You never know when he's going to be there, but it's crazy. A lot of people I've talked to have been like, "Yeah, I've just seen him at Dairy Queen. He was sitting in the back reading a paper and then he goes to a couple other spots." He never has any big-time security or anybody around him.

Two years ago, they were doing the Berkshire conference and I was there and he was there and I actually wound up getting a selfie with him, but it was really in passing, right? I have to find it and send it to you at some point. Yeah, I was literally two feet away from him. I got a selfie and looks we're in the picture together, but he was just in passing and I just happened to be in the right place at the right time, but not yet.

[0:17:16.7]

FT: My gosh. You'll get there. You'll get there.

[0:17:18.3]

CB: Yeah. I'm sure I will.

[0:17:19.9]

FT: You know he listens to this podcast. No, I'm totally kidding.

[0:17:22.6]

CB: He might.

[0:17:23.6]

FT: He might, maybe. I would actually like to know if he does listen to podcasts and which ones he does. I'd love to get him on this podcast, if anybody knows anybody who knows Warren Buffett, let me know.

[0:17:37.0]

CB: Well, I got a couple friends. I got a couple friends that are in close contact with him, so I'll see what I can do for you.

[0:17:44.3]

FT: Thank you. I appreciate that. All right, Casanova. Tell me this, what is your financial resolution? This is a question brought to us by our sponsor, Chase. We want to know, do you have anything on your to-do list that has to do with money in 2019?

[0:18:01.3]

CB: Yeah, absolutely. It's really getting out of debt a 100% completely. What I mean by that is I think that all debt is not bad debt. When you're using debt to be able to leverage and buy investments or buy assets that are going to produce, I don't think that that's bad debt. Then you have depreciating debt. For me, I bought a vehicle and this vehicle is almost paid off, but I want to make sure that by the end of the year, this vehicle would be a 100% paid off. Then my wife has student loan debt.

Going into 2020, if we have absolutely no debt that is a depreciating asset, that's a bad debt, in my opinion only, right? As long as I'm out of all of that debt, I think that that will be a great feat for me. I believe that is definitely accomplishable, because we've already took a big chunk at it, or a big hack at it this year already.

[0:18:55.8]

FT: What do you think about real estate in 2019? There have been predictions of a recession this year and of course, with interest rates rising that's never necessarily positive for the strength of the real estate market as people can't buy as much home and then they once could. What are you seeing? Are you seeing a little few signs of a softening in the real estate market in Omaha?

[0:19:23.8]

CB: Yes. All across the country, where we've been over the last two to two-and-a-half years is we've been in a seller's market. There's been very little inventory. Then what you also see across the country is there's a lot of builders that are still making homes, right? You wonder, "Okay, well what happens if we do go into a recession, because people won't be able to afford these new construction homes?"

Even here in Omaha, the average new construction home is probably around 400 to 425,000, somewhere in that range. You start to wonder what will happen. Now I always say, when people ask me how's the market? I always say the market is great, because the market is always great for someone. If you're in a seller's market, the market is great for you obviously. If we go into a recession, people who have saved up, people who have, or do have a line of credit or HELOC or something like that, they're able – or even obviously if you have cash liquid that you can invest into, but they're going to be able to use that money to buy up more property.

You never want to buy when everyone else is buying. You want to buy when everyone's selling. I even say that when people talk about investing. It's like, okay even if the market crashes and you own a good amount of properties, you don't really have to worry about that, because unless you need to sell tomorrow, the real estate market will come back up. They say the best time to buy real estate was 20 years ago, the second best time to buy real estate is today.

You want to wait. If you can own the land, you're going to be best off. If not, owning a real estate as long as you don't need to sell, I think that it's great. Even if we hit a little bit of a recession, I

still think that a lot of people are going to be okay, as long as they bought their property right. You make money when you buy in real estate, not when you sell.

[0:21:15.3]

FT: Awesome. Million Dollar Listing Omaha. I don't know, Bravo might have a new show coming to you, starring Casanova. What would you say is your five-year plan? Do you want to stay within real estate, or at the end of the day you're talking about like it's about connections, it's about relationships. Where else are you curious? What are other explorations are on tap for you?

[0:21:41.8]

CB: Yeah. I appreciate you asking that. Here in Omaha, there's a big conference. It used to be called big Omaha. Gary V about eight or nine years ago before he blew up, they got him to come here and be a keynote. Now it's been a lot tougher. Anyway, they've revamped this conference in. They haven't announced it yet, but it should be announced here in the next week. I'm emceeding this entire conference and there's some big names that are coming, so I'm super excited about that.

What's the next goal for me is to really find more stages where I can impact and influence. Speaking on entrepreneurship, speaking on sales and marketing and also just inspiring other people with my story, because I'm the same as anyone else, right? I've just built the relationships and that's the same way that I got a hold of you, I would say, right? Just being persistent. Making sure that I didn't have a fear. That I reached out. If you or anyone else was to ever say no, that's – sometimes we're always in our head, because it's like, “Oh, if I reach out and that says no or this person rejects me, Oh, my God, I would feel so bad.”

You got to understand that you're in no worse off spot than where you were before that person said no or rejected. For me, I think that's the next big thing is for me to get on to stages, be able to impact and influence and do I think what my calling is. Because I'd say all the time, real estate is great. It's allowed me to have a lot of success. Real estate is my what and my how. It's what I do and how I make my money, but it's not my why. My why is to be able to live a life by

my design, be able to have financial freedom, so my decisions are never based off of money, but more of the impact and the value that I can give.

[0:23:23.4]

FT: Wow. You're 31-years-old. So profound. Do you feel you've lived a life – I feel the things that you've experienced right, I feel as though have really accelerated your maturity and also your sensibility on just life.

[0:23:43.9]

CB: Yeah, yeah. I would say so. I would be honest to tell you that it wasn't always this way, right? I'm an inner-city Chicago kid, growing up without a father, raised by a single mom, then they made the decision to move me to Sioux City, Iowa. That was a huge culture shock, because I never – before we moved to Sioux City, Iowa, I never saw anybody who didn't look like me, unless we were downtown Chicago doing some type of – at a big library, so you see tourists. Or if I saw them on TV.

I never saw people who didn't look like me, but I was very fortunate that my parents made that decision because what that taught me was that I didn't grow up with an ignorant mindset. That was to say if you did not look like me, that you couldn't be with me, you had to be against me. From there, I just really started to focus on relation, because I was like, “Okay.”

Talking about Warren Buffett, this was one of the greatest things that I ever heard about Warren Buffett. I guess, he was at a conference or he was on a panel one day and someone asked Warren. They said, “Warren, how do when you truly been successful in life?” For a lot of people that know Warren, he doesn't really talk about afterlife and everything else. He doesn't do it. He's here and now type guy. He said, ‘You never know when you've truly been successful until you die and then you see how many people attend your funeral.’

Everybody's like, “Wow. Warren Buffett's talking about death?” Then he said, “More importantly, you'll never know how truly successful that you've been in life until you see how many people cry at your funeral, because those are the people that you've truly impacted their lives.” I was

just like, “Wow.” When I heard that, I was like, “That’s a 100% right.” At the end of the day, what's in my mind is no matter what, I don't want to get to 70 and I don't want to have any regret. I know that I got to go after everything that they said I couldn't have. I got to be – just like you said. If we look at my success, real estate didn't just start my success.

Before I got into real estate, I took a risk and I became a digital marketing consultant for a Fortune 500 company here in Omaha. Within nine months, I wound up finishing number eight in the entire company in inside sales and did more money in my center than anybody else. That was crazy. I was getting all these awards. Then even before that, I was at a car dealership and I sold cars where I knew nothing about cars, just like digital marketing and real estate. Within six months, I got a car salesman of the month two months in a row. I just came off my first 10K month and I beat out 27 other sales reps between three locations.

That was my first ever real job. I'd probably tell you, I've had I would say 16 or 17 different jobs where I was just trying to find my way. I was always feeling I was a lost kid, but I always knew that if I just kept pushing that I could be successful, because it's all about persistence, right? I heard from a good friend of mine, one day we were having coffee and he owns a multi-million dollar company here in Omaha. He said, “I want you to know that persistence respects persistence.” He was like, “Do you know what I mean?”

Then I was like, “Well, I kind of get it.” He was like, “If you think about anybody that you know that's very successful, the reason why they're successful is because they had to be relentless and persistent on their journey to get to where they are today.” Most people weren't given anything. If you're persistent, eventually they will come around and they'll see wow, this kid is really hustling and they'll be able to put themselves in your shoes even at a small taste, because they know what it was like for them if they're being honest and genuine.

For me, that's what I've always just focused on is just being persistent, relentless and making sure that I add value and never letting anybody tell me that something's not possible, because it always looks impossible until that one person does it. In the beginning, they'll ask you why you're doing it, and then the end they'll ask you how you did it.

[0:27:46.4]

FT: Yes. One of your quotes is 'As long as it's a calculated risk, take it. Don't look back'.

[0:27:53.6]

CB: Absolutely. Yes. Absolutely.

[0:27:56.2]

FT: That's a good money mantra.

[0:27:57.8]

CB: What'd you say?

[0:27:58.3]

FT: I said that's a pretty good money mantra.

[0:28:01.3]

CB: Absolutely. Because the reason why I love that is because no matter what the risk is that you're taking, whether it's financial, it's not, if you think about it, the only way that you're going to know if it was successful or not – everybody has a different path and there's so many different elements and factors that go with every single risk, so you can never compare your risk to someone else's. Whether it was financial or not, if you were to fail, you have to ask yourself what's the worst that can happen.

For me when I asked myself that question, what's the worst that could happen? I lay out all the things, but it's like, can you bounce back from this? Especially if we're talking about money. You absolutely can bounce back from it. We can always make more money, but the memories even if it was bad ones, you'll look back on this three, four, five, seven years from now and you'll be like, "Man." You're going to laugh about it. You're like, "I remember I did all of this and this and

this.” As long as you were ethical, you're not going to have any problem with it. You're going to you're going to really be so much more appreciative. That's the way that you'll have the stories to be able to tell your grandchildren or your grandchildren's friends or whatever like, “Let me tell you this. When I was young.”

Those are the people who we admire the most are elders who have all these stories, because they've accomplished so many things. Even so, the things that they didn't accomplish, they have experiences around them. It's like, “Wow, you took that leap.” It's like, “Oh, yeah. I didn't know how I was going to make it, but I did it. Then we just absolutely love it.”

[0:29:27.1]

FT: I love it, because what you're building is not just a life but a legacy. That is where I think it's also the difference between being rich and being wealthy, right?

[0:29:38.5]

CB: Right.

[0:29:39.7]

FT: I've learned so much from you Casanova and I know my audience has too. Thank you so much for joining us.

[0:29:45.7]

CB: Yes. Thank you for having me on. This was a huge, huge pleasure for me. I've followed your podcast for about the last nine, 10 months now and I try to listen to it religiously. I've learned so much from it, even from the small episodes that you're doing, like the one that you did about is a college degree worth it and so many things on the on the personal side, so I feel I've learned so much from you as I'm sure the rest of your audience has. I was just grateful that you allowed me to come on here and share my experiences with your audience and I appreciate you for that.

[0:30:17.5]

FT: Thank you so much, Casanova. Everybody, stayed tuned for after the music, I'll share more where you can learn about Casanova Brooks. I hope your day is so money, Casanova.

[0:30:27.1]

CB: Yes. I hope it is as well. I got another appointment right after this, and so I'm excited about it, but I'm more excited and appreciative to be here today with you.

[END]