

EPISODE 1068

“LP: Growing up in the environment that I did, I carried a lot of shame not having money, always struggling with it. Like we would be the family on the street and the suburbs where we always had a broken down car in the front yard, and my parents were hippies, and that was scary to other people. I don’t think I understood how deep that shame went about the way that we were labeled, even to the point where kids would say, ‘I can’t come to your house. My parents don’t think it’s safe.’”

[INTRODUCTION]

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FT: We've all heard the expression white trash. It's not a favorite term, and I feel even a little uncomfortable using it. But my guest today says that's how she identified herself growing up. Leisa Peterson grew up in a home where her parents were not educated. Her father dealt drugs, and she says, “I was modeled horrible things when I was young, including having access way too early life to adult discussions like the use of drugs, pornography, the selling of drugs, and also having incidents with the law.” The trauma that she felt was continuous throughout much of her life.

Today, she has broken free from that and is helping others reconcile their trauma to live more fulfilling lives and have a deeper closer relationship with money. This is her second time stopping by the show. She was on So Money a couple of years ago. Leisa is the Founder of wealthclinic.com. She has a podcast now called Art of Abundance and a new book called *The Mindful Millionaire*. Her new book explores these tough topics and the underbelly of our relationship with money and the idea that you don't have to forget where you came from in order to break free and create wealth for yourself. Here's Leisa Peterson.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Leisa Peterson, welcome back to So Money. It has been two and a half years and quite the two and a half years for all of us.

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LP: Definitely. Thank you so much. I'm so happy to be here, Farnoosh, with you and your listeners.

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FT: It's my pleasure. You came on back in January of 2018, the first time I introduced you to audience. You have a podcast called Art of Abundance. You run a coaching business, helping people kind of reconcile with their financial emotions, their relationship with money at wealthclinic.com and the wealthflower.com. In all of these years, these last two and half years, time goes by quickly, you have been working on a book. That is what I would love to start with today. The book is called *The Mindful Millionaire*.

In the world that we're in today, much different than when you started writing this book then when it came out. It's coming out later this month. I'd love to just first start with a question around the relatability, the applicability of your advice in the world that we live in today, a world where we've got a pandemic that we're grappling with. We have racial tension and hopefully we're seeing some pivoting on the racial front in 2020. I'm just curious where you see your book addressing some of the needs today, financial needs.

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LP: Great question. I was thinking about the fact that if there were a title that appealed to the times that we're in, it would be how to stop worrying about money. That is probably the biggest theme that I think a lot of people are feeling. Maybe more now than they have in past years, because obviously we've had this incredible economy for the past 10 years. People were feeling pretty excited about money in many cases. But what I've been fascinated about in all of my journey and working in the money business for 25 years was why do some people worry about

money all the time no matter what's going on. But now, it's even more pronounced. Does that make sense?

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FT: Yeah, absolutely. I mean, if you walked into this pandemic/crazy year of 2020 already nervous predisposed to having anxiety around money, I mean, I can't even imagine where your head's at now. That's a lot of your clients.

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LP: Totally. I wanted to inspire people to heal this relationship with money, and that's what I feel like I have been working on for a long time. But what I also noticed and I think might help people think about this in a different context is that I noticed in being a financial advisor and being a mortgage banker and working in so many different areas of finance that there were two types of people. One who was more what I would say prosperity-conscious. Money just went really easily for them. They found themselves through challenges quite easily. They recovered. They didn't get caught up in all kinds of stories. Those were often people who had done quite well with money.

Then there was this whole other population, which I'm going to call scarcity-minded, which I would consider myself one of those people that no matter how much money I had or didn't have, I still worried about it all the time. That's what I'm exploring in the book throughout. Where are you and how might you change if you're not happy with the way that relationship is going down?

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FT: So much of how we manage our money today and how we relate to money stems from what we were taught growing up, and that is especially true in cultures where there isn't a lot of literacy or resources or "wealth." There's a bigger chance of you sort of like repeating that in your own life, that cycle. You, however, were able to break from that because you yourself, as you mentioned, grew up in a household where your father was dealing drugs, and money was not a topic you talked about. Personally for you, how did you break from that? This is stuff that

you talked about two years ago, but I'm wondering now as you reflect more on your childhood and as you've been writing and looking at what's happening in the world and connecting some more dots, have you made any sort of new revelations about your own ability to break from that and what we can learn from that?

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LP: Definitely. When I was growing up, like you said, my parents fought a lot about money, so we weren't talking about it in a healthy way. We were talking about it in a really emotionally abusive way for myself, for my mom, for my dad. That created a lot of stories about money, and so I think the reason I broke out of that pattern wasn't because there was education in the home or even in school, right? I talk about this in the book but that I just made a personal decision that I didn't want to live the same way that my parents had. But the big realization too that I want to add in that has been very healing for me over this past year as I was finishing the book was the understanding that growing up in the environment that I did, I carried a lot of shame because there were not having money, always struggling with it. We would be the family on the street in the suburbs where we always had a broken down car in the front yard, and my parents were hippies, and that was scary to other people. I don't think I understood how deep that shame went about the way that we were labeled, even to the point where kids would say, "I can't come to your house. My parents don't think it's safe."

When I'm writing this story about money and all the stuff is coming out, I've realized that I was – In many cases, when I was that little girl at eight years old deciding I wanted to be a millionaire someday, it was coming from this repressed place of like, "I'll show you, world. I'll get that money. I'll be successful. I'm not like what people seem to label our family as being." It worked out for a while. I did become a millionaire in my mid-30s. But what also happened along the way was I started to realize that when you're creating money from a deeply repressed, a lot of pain underneath it, that also doesn't play out very well.

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FT: You being a millionaire in your 30s, can you tell us how you did that again? People may not have caught it the first time you're on the show. Just we'll do a recap.

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LP: Yeah. A couple things. First of all, I made that decision early in life. I didn't know how I would get there, but what happened was when you're tuned in just like an antenna, focused in a certain direction. I remember in the mid-'90s after I finished my MBA, I was starting to get paid decent and I started watching my net worth and I started reading books like *Rich Dad Poor Dad* and *The Millionaire Next Door* and *Your Money or Your Life*. Those books fuelled me to start to say, "Hey, you need to pay attention to this." If you pay attention to your net worth, this was my thinking, and you're always paying attention to it, that it will come.

What happened was opportunity started coming, and I started making choices about – One example is I worked for State Farm Insurance early in my career, and there was the Northridge earthquake in Los Angeles, and I volunteered much to my husband's dismay that I would go away for almost seven months. In that time, you'd get paid disaster pay and all this other money and per diems. I was like, "I'm going to save it all. I'm not going to spend anything." I walked out of that six-month experience with \$30,000 in the bank. Those were the sorts of things that I used to do like, "Where is the opportunity, and I'm going to pursue it." We figured out that building houses – Because my husband is a contractor, we started using that money to plow into another house and a fixer-upper and then another build a house from ground zero. We just started creating a system where I knew how to take care of the financing, and my husband would like build a house or remodel a house or take on a project. It was always just building, building, building, and that's how we did it.

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FT: What was that moment like when you realized, "Oh, our net worth is seven figures."?

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LP: Well, because I was paying so much attention to it, I think I was like, "It's coming. It's coming." But there was this moment that I just will never forget as long as I live. We had bought a house in Walnut Creek and we were moving to Tahoe and we had remodeled the house in

Walnut Creek and then we were moving. I remember that I put my daughter who was like two or three at the time in the car and we had just closed on the house sale. I knew at some point between Walnut Creek and Lake Tahoe, which is like a four-hour drive, at some point this check for \$250,000 was going to be deposited into our bank account. It was the most magical drive ever because I was like, "This is happening. You are making this happen." Honestly, I don't think ever since then it's been as big of a deal as that drive because I said, "You know what? This is possible."

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FT: You broke from a lot of classism. You talk about these are your terms, like the white trash stigma that you kind of grew up with. But that it's important to not forget where you came from. How do you reconcile that? On the one hand, you're trying to move away from some of the issues that you grew up with and create your own life and correct some of those mistakes, but that's where I get stuck. What is it about your past that you should be holding onto to benefit you?

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LP: Yeah. It's a great question and I think about this a lot in my coaching business and my classes because – Even in writing the book, I didn't realize when I started writing the book that I was creating a manual that would help not just me, someone who had made a lot of money but still worried about money, but I also wanted to write a book that would have helped my parents who were no longer alive that people who weren't taught about money that struggled with it that – I didn't want to lose that.

I'm kind of shocked now because somebody would say, "Oh, you can only have one reader or one listener, target person." But I actually accomplished this objective that it speaks to both sides because there's actually a lot of commonality. I don't forget where I've come from and I do channel it into the teachings in the book because I want to help people who don't realize that they have a lot more power than they maybe ever thought possible to create wealth for themselves. I know my parents didn't believe that was possible for them, so they didn't even try.

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FT: I just wrapped a lengthy series called Black Wealth Matters on the show where I interviewed a number of black individuals, African-American individuals who've achieved so much greatness, financial greatness, career greatness, despite a lot of obstacles. We know them. Racism to name one. One of the things that I heard over and over again was that this idea, this advice that like if I can do it, you can too. If you just put your mind to it, you can do it does not really apply to many people of color because what they're fighting against is so much more difficult and unique than the general population. Things like systemic racism, right? If you have facing you a client who is a black individual who's coming to you, Leisa, with like growing up without literacy, growing up without resources, beyond mindset what else do you think you would want to inform this person on?

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LP: The thing that comes to mind and these are my clients. I want to be clear. I have worked with these folks and continue to work with these folks. I think that it's both, right? The teaching I'm expressing is that, like you said, there's the mindset piece. There's this permission piece, so I feel like it's super important. Then there's the practical piece. Even today in a class I was teaching, what I think a lot of people struggle with is they have big goals for themselves. They do want more. They know that but they've never had anyone break it into really, really small parts of how to get there. Sometimes, it's like microscopic. Today, in this discussion, some of the goal setting was around money and like breaking that into parts like, "I want to be a millionaire in 20 years. What does that look like? What are the steps I can start to take today to get there?"

But then also sometimes, before you can even start there, there are some emotional things, this deep wounding inside that tells you it's impossible or tells you that it's just not in the cards for you. I found that if you don't look at those beliefs at the same time as also taking practical steps, there's a good chance that even if you get the money, you'll self-sabotage, right? These are the lottery winners that get lots of money and it's gone quickly or celebrities or professional ballplayers. That is true that if we've got the deep repressed wounding going on and you're not looking at it at all, just having the money isn't going to solve all the problems that you think it is.

I like going back and forth, like having an action plan that includes emotional health and creating incredible action plans that say how do I get there and breaking it into the tiniest of spots of aspects where it might be what I – One of the reasons I think I've built wealth, and this is kind of fitting into this question is that I'm not a great saver. I'll be the first to admit that. But if you give me a project that I am going to build a house and I need like \$200,000 for that, I am amazing at getting the money for that purpose. I asked people what's going to be your biggest motivator to actually have more money. What are you going to get super excited about? Maybe it's a passion-filled business. Maybe it's just flipping houses. What are you going to be excited about that that project takes over and causes you to make different choices so that that money starts showing up in your bank account.

[00:16:41]

FT: Yeah. It's getting to really at the level of where this person is at and where they came from. I think we're going to see a bit of a shift in the personal finance space where blanket advice is going to be falling on more deaf ears. That's a good thing. I think that we need to get a little bit more and a lot more granular with how we provide advice.

Myleik Teele came on my podcast during Black Wealth Matters, the series, and she's an entrepreneur, Founder of curlBOX, a millionaire. But she says at this point in her life, despite having built this incredible financial life, she suffers from mixed emotions, right? One is like feeling as though she doesn't deserve it. That someone's going to take it all away from her, and so she sees a psychotherapist in conjunction with a financial advisor, perhaps to really get her arms wrapped around her financial mission and her management. I think that's a great pairing.

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LP: It is a great pairing. I think because I've been teaching meditation since 2003 and doing breakthrough work and then also being a financial advisor and being a certified financial planner designation, like I wanted to combine these two things together. It was like a dream that I wasn't even sure I could bring it all together. What ended up coming through the process of writing the book was to take everything that I was using like the journaling questions and the procedures and the steps that people needed to go through that they could finish the process saying, "I've

looked at these patterns that repeat themselves over and over again with money. I figured out a new way. I'm writing a new money story for myself. I'm looking at what the one has been in the past. I'm not ignoring it. I'm being brutally honest but I'm also saying this is a story I want going forward."

Then at the end, it's about holistic financial planning that's tied into the core values of like what's most important to you, and it's built on the things that I didn't like in the traditional way of financial planning. I felt like it left out these super important core value questions and understanding yourself and like what's most important. I came up with my own idea of what financial planning could look like with this more heart-centered approach.

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FT: Well, sticking with financial planning, a lot of us are reevaluating our plans right now with everything that's been up ended. People have been losing their jobs. The economy is – We're officially in a recession. The stock market, I don't know why it keeps going up, but that is probably a short-lived thing. It's not pessimism. It's just at this point being realistic. Personally, have you shifted your planning, so to speak, given a lot of the uncertainty that we're in right now? Many people compare this to the Great Recession, but I think there's a lot of differences. I think this is much more serious in other ways, harder to recover in other ways than the Great Recession. It's far more widespread the current recession that we're in. Then, of course, you've got the health scare. What do you think is necessary to shift around when it comes to financial planning right now or some of the new questions we need to be asking ourselves? At least from where you stand, what's been changing on your front?

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LP: Yeah. There's a lot of change happening right now. I think that I have been managing my own money for the past 10 years. Even with what happened over the past couple of months, I realized that I am not the best person to be doing that, and so I've actually been working with moving all of our assets over to an advisor who specializes in socially responsible, socially conscious investing. It's like a completely different not just playing the market, not just putting all the money in the stock market, which I'm not comfortable with. We talked about that last time we

met. I'm looking for alternative ways, maybe businesses, business owners that can't get financing without contributions from investors. I want to go really creative and very, very diversified, and I'm not comfortable putting it all on the stock market.

In fact, I'm just really – I've always been torn, and so my change personally is how can I continue to – I probably won't be accessing this money for almost 20 years. I have a long-time horizon. I'm thinking about those things. I'm thinking about that it's okay with going down, going up, volatility. I know that's a part of the journey but I also see that I want a higher consciousness applied to this money and I don't feel like I can get that by me just managing it myself. That's been my big switch and I'm not sure – Does that answer your question?

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FT: Yes. What I'm hearing is that you're not – As before, maybe you were more bullish on the stock market. That's not the case right now, and so where are the shifts happening? Are you putting more in cash? Are you doing more in the real estate arena? Are you putting it back into your business? Where are you shifting the money around?

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LP: Yes. It probably helps to mention that our investable assets are about 25% of our portfolio and maybe another – What would that be? 60, 65% are real estate. What I'm doing is I am, like you said, not so bullish on the stock market but I'm looking at diversifying into other types of investing and making sure that it reflects my core values about the environment, the companies that we're investing in, those choices. That's what I'm wanting and I have – I'm just now beginning this process because I just talked to the advisor the other day. It's someone that I've been following for years. It's like allowing my heart and my conscious awareness of how I want to be a contributor. I want my money to be a contributor to the betterment of the world and I'm willing to even – If it were to be take less of a return to have that assurance, like I'm totally in for the long haul. That's how I'm looking at it.

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FT: You're an active member of the personal finance community, Leisa. I'm sure you've been observing some of the conversations that have been happening when it comes to politics, whether or not to make personal finance a political issue. I'll be the first to admit that I don't really see, for example, race as a political issue, racial equality as a political issue. It's a human rights effort and necessity. But some audience members and even some people within our community take issue with taking even those public stands and saying, for example, that it's important to support the NAACP or to understand that if you come from a black household, there are different odds against you when it comes to becoming financially successful in your life. We need to recognize that.

What do you think is the role of personal finance when it comes to supporting antiracism and promoting all people to really achieve financial success, including the black community and how – I just – This is not like a right or wrong answer. I really just want to understand where the pulse is on this.

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LP: I mean, yes, I totally support black lives matter and I support income equality. I feel like those go hand-in-hand, the racial and black tax and all of the things that I'm still becoming even more familiar with. I am all in. I want to learn more about it. What I've been doing this past few weeks is understanding the intersection between what I have created in this process and how it helps people. My little small take in this journey is that even something like race. I'm a white woman and what I have learned in the past 20 years of questioning all of my assumptions is that when we get in the habit of realizing that we don't have all the answers, that we're not like in control of the world like we might have thought we were or whatever it is that our story is. The more we question the assumptions, the more humble we become about the way we look at the world and what we don't know and what we need to learn.

With money, I just have seen over and over and over again that people have been told certain stories that if you're black, that this is what your life is going to look like. Or if you're poor, this is what your life is going to look like. I feel like I want my work to be out there, helping people look inside. Ask themselves some hard questions and get used to that discomfort of realizing that you actually don't maybe know as much as you thought.

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FT: Yeah, I 100% agree with the fact that we all need to just listen more and learn more and not make assumptions. Yeah, I think this is going to be an important chapter in everybody's work but especially within the personal finance community. We really applaud you for all the work that you're doing, Leisa. Sharing your wisdom with the world and being so inclusive about it. Congratulations on your book what's next? What are you working on next? You're always working on something.

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LP: Always working on something. Well, I'm super excited about the book launch. This is a big deal for me. St. Martin's Press decided that this story that we've been talking about is something that other people needed to know about. I will say that liberation of kind of being in the background even in the personal finance space, I'm so excited to talk to you about this today just because having it breathe and be recognized and I know you've had a lot of people like listen to your podcast. Have these beautiful discussions about the inner intersection with the outer financial world.

But what's next? I'm thinking about another book. One topic that comes up is this concept of economic bypassing like why would a human being not see financial wealth as a core part of their own self-care. That's something I'm still kind of researching, but it's fun to explore because I feel like there are a lot of people that don't understand why they haven't been able to take good care of themselves financially. The more I can do to help them see that there are ways to break out of patterns, sign me up.

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FT: Yeah. That's a great, great topic, and I don't think really explored very much, so looking forward to that. No doubt you'll do a great job exploring that and sharing that. We'll have you back when that's complete. Is that a deal?

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LP: That would be wonderful.

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FT: Leisa Peterson, thank you so much.

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LP: Thank you.

[END]