

EPISODE 1313

[INTRO]

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FT: So Money is brought to you by CNET, the site that shows how to navigate change all around us. So Money episode 1313, Lauren Greutman, host of The Hard Money Talks podcast.

***LG:** The shame of failing a second time is what kept me silent from that because I felt like I run a successful business. I have four kids. Like I've got my stuff together. Maybe I don't."*

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. How's everyone doing? Happy February. You may recall our guest who is back on the show today. Lauren Greutman joined So Money first in 2015. She and her then husband, Mark, were running a major financial platform helping everyday women, particularly moms, with things like budgeting, getting out of debt, side hustles. Fast forward to today, Lauren has a different story to share. Life's evolved, and she's ready to have the harder conversations about money. She is now the host of a podcast called The Hard Money Talks podcast where she talks about money in the context of financial abuse, spending addictions, financial infidelity, gambling, and much more.

In our conversation, you'll hear in her own words, how she overcame two divorces, most recently breaking up with a person whom she describes as a narcissist. How did that impact their relationship, her finances, and what she is teaching her new audience about reclaiming your financial life? Here's Lauren Greutman.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Lauren Greutman, welcome back to So Money. A blast from the past, my friend. It's about six years last time you're on So Money, and it's just nice to have you back to catch up. How are you?

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LG: Good. How are you? I'm glad to be back. I can't believe it's been six years. Wow, I feel like a dinosaur.

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FT: The last two years has felt like six years. So where does six years leave us? Last we connected, you were running a huge financial platform, helping largely women with all of the financial aspects of running a household, budgeting, meal planning, getting out of debt, how to have that side hustle. You were on the show twice, once with your former husband, Mark, and then, again, to promote your last book. Catch me up because I know that fast forward to today, your platform is changed. The lens through which you talk about money has also changed. So maybe share some of the big life events that have shaped where you are today.

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LG: Yeah. As you mentioned, former husband, right? So Mark and I, we're very much a big part of the website together back when – I think we came on the podcast together in 2015. We were both very much a part of my website, laurengreutman.com. We also had another website together. Suddenly, our marriage fell apart in 2017, and we got divorced. That was really hard for many different reasons, breaking up a family. We have four children together. But then also doing it kind of like in the public spotlight because we had so many people following our website, all of that. So that was really tricky.

Then so many – Right after that, I really kind of was like, “Okay, I'm going to find myself, and I'm going to stay single, and I'm going to do what I have to do and take care of my kids. Shortly after that, probably about eight months after that relationship ended, I found myself in another relationship with a man that I thought I was going to – Who was my knight in shining armor,

right? Like, “Oh, my gosh. I didn't know amazing men like this existed.” Shortly after that, I remarried this other man who I thought I was going to be with forever. It turns out that he was cheating on me, and he was abusive emotionally and financially and spiritually and verbally abusive. I knew pretty much on the wedding night that I had made a big mistake, and that I needed to get out of that relationship. But it's not so easy to get out of that relationship.

When I first came on the podcast, I still do what I do, which is teach personal finance, and I still teach budgeting. I still teach side hustles. I still teach how to get out of debt because that's how I started my website. I was in a lot of debt, and I taught people how to get out. Fast forward to where I am now, things aren't so cut and dry anymore for me. I've been through not one but two divorces. I mean, the first one was hard because it was my kids' father, and it was difficult. The second one was like a kick in the pants. I didn't want to get – I'm like, “I'm a professional. I'm a financial professional. How do I fall into this trap with a man like this who is a narcissist?” What I found through sharing my story is that so many women have fallen for this same type of person.

Through the past couple of years, I've really shifted my focus to just teaching shame-free finance. So what does that mean is that not everything is so cut and dry. Like people can say, “You need to combine your finances with your spouse, right?” But what if your spouse is abusive? Should you do that? So I've really kind of taken a 180. I started teaching shame-free finances. I've really taken an interest in financial abuse and narcissistic abuse and really done a lot of studying and interest in that because I've personally been through it. I still have a restraining order on this man. There was a lot of stalking and harassment. He got arrested for breaking the restraining order. So there's been a lot personally that's going on in my life.

Then in the business aspect, how do I turn that around and use this for good? Starting the podcast, the Hard Money Talk Show podcast, where we talk about these hard money conversations, and then just giving back to my community. Volunteering at domestic violence shelters has been something that's been really fulfilling for me. That's kind of been my journey. I stayed silent for it for a while. I stayed – I didn't share my story because I was ashamed of it. This year, I decided let's come out and share it.

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FT: I think getting a divorce, whatever the reason is, is a very brave thing to do. Going back to your first divorce, I mean, that alone I think was a remarkable thing to do. Because as you said, it was in the spot. You were in the spotlight. You had children. You had built a business together. There was a lot of detangling that needed to happen. Going back to that time in your life, what were some of the lessons you learned, and why were you embarrassed or shameful of it?

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LG: One of the biggest lessons that I learned is that I'm only responsible for my happiness, not anybody else's, and I can't make anybody else happy. I can only work on myself. I can't force somebody else to change. I can only change myself. So those have been the constant lessons throughout the past five years that I've really had to work on is I love the saying of like God bless them. Change me. I can only control myself. I can only control my situation.

So with the divorce of Mark and I, we really got married young. We grew apart. We have a very great friendship. We co-parent very well together. He's getting remarried shortly, and I absolutely adore his fiancé. Mark and I are in a good place. It wasn't one of those like divorces where all hell breaks loose, and you hate each other. It wasn't. It was an amicable divorce. I still have a lot of respect and care for him. I don't know if I was as shameful about that one as I was the second one.

The second one, it's like nobody wants to be divorced twice, and I felt like, "Oh, my gosh. I have just really messed up. How do I make this mistake? How did I make this mistake? I'm a smart person." Then –

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FT: Well, looking back, Lauren, you say he like overnight became this nightmare and this terrible person. But were there hints? Looking back, of course, hindsight is 20/20, but this isn't, again, to say like how could you have not known. But only now in hindsight, we see these things that may have been – We may have brushed off. We may say, "Oh, he's having a bad day." Tell us what you experienced.

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LG: Yeah, definitely. So when you're in a relationship with a narcissist, there's this stage in the beginning called love bombing. They love bomb you, which means that everything is about you, and it's so intoxicating. Anybody who knows, has been in a relationship with a narcissist, the term love bombing is something that's very familiar. So you feel like you've met Prince Charming, right? You feel like you've met the person of your dreams. Everything about them is exactly what you've always wanted. You don't know how this person is single, yada, yada, yada. Like on and on and on, right?

Then you start seeing little clues. Oh, he might be a little jealous. But, oh, like maybe I did something wrong. But I was raised in like a Christian household, so like I was raised with the idea that when you marry somebody, kind of like the man is the head of the household, right? But you know what? Then I'm also a New Age lady where I'm like, "No, I'm not buying that anymore." There were a lot of red flags that I that I ignored because I thought I was in love. Looking back, it was like moving in together too soon, him telling me he loved me too soon, the gifts, the over the top love bombing, the lies, the cheating because I did find out he cheated on me early on, and I decided to brush it under the rug, the gas lighting. You feel like you're going crazy. I mean, it was like the craziest, shortest relationship I've ever had.

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FT: But to your credit, you've figured it out pretty quick. Unfortunate that you were in your wedding gown thinking, "I don't think this is the guy." But you didn't let it linger for too long. Divorces do take time.

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LG: Yes, they do. It took me almost exactly a year to officially divorce him. So it was difficult. I think the shame of failing a second time is what kept me silent from that because I felt like I run a successful business. I have four kids. I've got my stuff together. Maybe I don't. I ignored a lot of red a red flags. Now, I know them all. But I didn't even know the red flags to look for.

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FT: Being the breadwinner in your second marriage, how was that helpful to you in the divorce process but also maybe a cause for the marriage not working out? He probably didn't like that either.

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LG: No. So you can either – There's like rich narcissists. There's poor narcissists, right? Mine came in as a poor narcissist, and he didn't have really many assets to his name or anything like that. So I ended up buying him a truck. He got – He walked away with a paid for truck. I walked away with debt, unfortunately, from a real estate investment that went bad. That's about it. I mean, we were married for such a short amount of time that really it didn't matter whose money was what. At that point, I know that in long-term narcissistic divorce cases, if you are the breadwinner, and you are the victim of the narcissist, they'll take you for all that you've got. But because we were married for such a short time, it really didn't.

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FT: So you hadn't combined your finances and all that.

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LG: Yeah, a little bit. But because we were married for such a short amount of time, I mean, really, he walked away with a paid for truck, and I walked away with some debt, which I can pay off. So it was a good learning opportunity for me. Had I had gone back, I wouldn't have done certain things. I wouldn't have – I mean, I cashed out some of my retirement to pay off some of his back bills, which I wouldn't have done.

But, again, in my mind, if you get married, you're in it together as a team, and that's how I was viewing it. I was viewing like, “Okay, we're going to work together as a team. You started this successful business. We're working together. I'll cash out some of my retirement, help you pay off this bill, and then you'll help me the next time.” But the next time never came. It's one of

those things where I had to choose. Am I going to be bitter about it and fight for it? Or am I just going to move on? For me, it was like I want to be happy. I want to continue to heal and grow and change, and that was the choice that I had to make.

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FT: Coming out of your experience in trauma, you discovered a large community of women and men. How are you finding the best way to help this community when it comes to money? On one of the episodes that I did about financial abuse, a brave victim came on our show and said, "I knew this was not working for a long time. Like I was in this – I was trapped in this relationship for a long time, but I was so afraid of the consequences of escaping." A lot of times, people go, "Why don't you just leave?" She's like, "I thought about it every second. But I also have to weigh that against my safety of leaving." It's not just clear. It's not that easy because he can come after you. You had to get a restraining order. Talk us through some of those things, those realities that I think a lot of us don't think about when it comes to how hard it is for people who are in abusive relationships to get themselves to financial safety, emotional safety, all of it.

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LG: Yeah. So my background is in drug and alcohol counseling, right? Before I became a financial educator, I was a drug and alcohol counselor. So I had some education on abuse to begin with, but I had never been in the situation myself. It's definitely different when you're in the situation yourself. For me, for example, I knew that leaving – Based on his previous relationships, I knew that I was going to lose most of my friends because of how – If you want to look up another term, it's called flying monkeys. Similar to Wizard of Oz, when the witch sends the monkeys off to go gather information and then brings the information back to her, flying monkeys are what narcissists use to go and gather information, continue to gaslight, and emotionally harm the victims, and then come back and bring information back to the narcissist.

When I left him, I lost about 85% of my friends because he suddenly is telling everybody that I'm crazy. So I lost most of my friends to this man and still have not gained them back because I've decided like, "Okay, you're not worth it anyway," but some very, very good friends of mine. You don't leave because you know that stuff like that's going to happen. You know that he's going to

launch this big campaign against you, tell everybody that you're crazy. That kept me probably in the relationship about eight months longer than I would have because I knew – I had kicked him out in February of this one year, and then he stayed until about eight months longer. I saw the gas lighting and flying monkey stuff happen in that February, and I was like, “Okay, I got a problem here. Like this is going to happen.”

What I've done is I've realized that a lot of the financial education that I was teaching was so cut and dry like, “This is what you do, right? X, Y, and Z.” But I'm ignoring the emotional aspects behind why people are failing with their money. I realized that by not addressing those emotional aspects of why people are failing with their money, whether it's mental health, whether it's substance abuse, whether it's emotional abuse, whether it's financial abuse, domestic violence, whatever it is that I'm missing, I'm missing the ball, right? I'm missing what's really going on.

So I decided to develop a community. It's called the Financial Renovation Community, where I get together with a group of people, all of my community. We have a few hundred in there, where we get together, and we do actually do a support group once a week. It's kind of we sit down, and we talk about our feelings. We talk about our feelings surrounding money. That's been really healing for a lot of people because we don't get that platform very often to sit down and talk about why we're failing with our money. It's like, well, maybe you're failing with your money because you have undiagnosed bipolar. Or maybe you're feeling with your money because you have a poverty mentality from when you were a child, and let's dig in that. Maybe you're feeling with your money because you're in a domestic violence relationship, and you don't realize it. So come and talk to me. We'll set up a one on one, and I'll help you, teach you how to get out of it.

That's kind of how I've changed the conversation, is let's talk about the deep stuff, combined with the Hard Money Talks podcast, which I started, which talks about all of those things.

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FT: I see now. You launched in December, so right before the New Year. You've also talked to Ed Coombs who has been a guest on the show. I love Ed. I think his views on attachment, style, parenting, and how that – Whatever attachment style you had as a kid and how that shows up in

your financial life. So, so profound. You did talk about bipolarism, so maybe touch on that. That's something we have not covered. Maybe I should do a whole series on mental health and personal finance. I think there's so much to unpack there. But we recently talked to Dr. Thomas Richards on how bipolar affects our spending. What are the signs that maybe this is what's showing up in your life?

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LG: One of the big distinctions that he was talking about when it comes to bipolar and overspending and impulse buying is the main difference is when you're spending with a big grand project in mind, and you have to get it done right now. So he gave the example from his own life because he's bipolar, that he had this idea that in order to make extra money, he needed to decide to start making some music in his – Maybe become a DJ. Then overnight, he's suddenly buying thousands of dollars' worth of DJ equipment, and he's going to go and DJ at all these big clubs. He has this whole big grand plan, and he's spent thousands of dollars on DJ equipment. The idea goes like huge, right?

That's a little bit different than somebody that has impulsive spending who says, "Okay. Well, I might go and buy this because I might go and make some music, and that sounds like a good idea." He says the big defining factor between if you have bipolar spending versus impulsive spending is that usually bipolar spending is attached to like a project or like a big idea, which I thought was pretty fascinating to break it down that way. He gave some really practical tips. If people go back and look at the episode about how to curb if you are bipolar, how to stop a bipolar like binge in spending, he had some cool apps and websites and things like that, that can help you with that spending.

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FT: Wow, fascinating. What are some future topics on mental health and money that you are looking to cover? I'm looking to now do this. I'm so – I really think it's important to dedicate some real time to this topic. I mean, you have a whole podcast. I'll just do a little slice of it. Maybe we'll come back for that.

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LG: Yeah. One of the things that I'm covering is addiction. I just did an interview with two gambling addicts and how that affects their personal finances. So as an addiction specialist, a lot of times when some people quit one addiction, they often pick up another one. A lot of times, especially if somebody has quit drinking alcohol, they usually pick up spending as the next one. I don't know why, but that's kind of what happens. I've interviewed people that have gone in and out of bankruptcy a couple of times. I've also interviewed people that have recovered from like the sex industry and how to get themselves back on track after recovering from that. Those are some other episodes that I'm covering on the show.

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FT: How are your kids? You have four children, Lauren, which is always such an impressive statistic.

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LG: Thank you.

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FT: I have two. I don't know how you've doubled that number. From ages 16, all the way down?

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LG: Yeah. Yeah. They're doing amazing.

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FT: Well, how do you communicate with them these sorts of things? Like at what age? Does your 16-year-old know everything? Or do you sort of share only certain aspects of what's really happening in mom's life?

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LG: Yeah. So my 16-year-old, he's a junior in high school and he – Him and I – To be honest, like he gives me some amazing pep talks. He's is a wise, smart, amazing young man, and I couldn't be prouder than I am with him. He actually works on my website now part time, and helps me do some editing and writing. That's fun to bring him on board. My 12-year-old daughter is in seventh grade. Mark and I actually just pulled her from public school and are homeschooling her now. So we have that new challenge of homeschooling in a divorced home. But Mark and I literally live like three blocks from each other, and we have excellent communication. His fiancé, soon to be wife, homeschools her three kids. So she's been a joy to help with this process. Then my other two daughters are 10 and 8, and they're super fun.

To be honest, the light bulb moment for me when I ended the relationship, the second marriage, was it was on a day where I had asked him to help me clean the kitchen, and he got right up in my face swearing F you, F you, F you right up in my face. My 10-year-old daughter walked in, and she started yelling at him, and she said, “Why do you talk to my mom that way?” That was the moment when I said – Actually, the first thought in my mind was, “Why do I let him talk that way in front of my kids?” Then I was like, “Whoa, whoa. Why do I let him talk to me that way at all?” That was the day I asked him to leave.

They knew. They saw. That 10-year-old daughter, unfortunately, saw that. All the kids could feel it. So actually, just a couple of days ago, my 12-year-old daughter turned to me and she looked at me and she goes, “Do you think he knows that we're happy?” I said, “I don't know. I don't know. But that's not what's important. What's important is that we are happy, and that we're doing fine, and that we're strong and capable.” So it's given us as a family, like me and my four kids, it's given us a lot to talk about. It's given my daughters something to see. Unfortunately, they had to live through it, but it's given them something to see of like this is not what love is. This is not how you're supposed to be treated. Not that I wanted that for them, and sometimes I apologize like, “I'm sorry if I got you guys involved in that.” They're like, “It's okay. We learned a lot.” But they're awesome, amazing, wonderful.

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FT: Kids are resilient.

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LG: They are. They are.

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FT: Let me tell you, we often – We want to protect them so much. Sometimes, we have to do the hard things, and sometimes it's in front of them. But I think your kids seeing you with your follow through and your conviction, that's what they're going to remember. That's the bottom line for them, right? They're going to look back and go, “It was hard, but we got through it. And more than that, we ended up happy.”

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LG: Well, and the alternative was, what, staying in it. For what? For what?

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FT: For what, right.

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LG: To help my embarrassment, to keep my shame at bay. That was the alternative.

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FT: I have this theory about fear. I'm writing a lot about fear right now. The thing that we're afraid of, I want to make you more frightened of something else, which is that if you actually allow this fear to immobilize you and to not allow you to move forward, there is a scarier thing on the other side of that. So like to face that fear, the bigger fear that you maybe haven't thought about, you

haven't worked out, you haven't gone to that level. When you're really scared, when you have that nightmare, it does wake you up to think, "Oh, it's a scary thing. I have to deal with my shame, the public humiliation of getting married, admitting I was wrong."

I'm not saying that's easy, but what is the flip side of that? That if you don't leave, you have more years of torture, and you're not just torturing yourself but others, your children. That's scarier.

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LG: That was the scarier thing.

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FT: Facing that, right. It gets you to the place of, okay, taking action, doing something about it.

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LG: Exactly. So true.

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FT: Well, I can't wait to join you on your podcast and talk about the depth of my stories. Maybe not so much as the ones you've already had in terms of unpacking these really hard and important topics like bipolarism and abuse, but I'm happy to come on and talk about, well, anything you want.

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LG: [inaudible 00:25:11] to have you on. It'll be fun.

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FT: Lauren Greutman, thanks so much. It's nice to reconnect. Happy to see you.

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LG: Happy to see you.

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FT: And more to come.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: Thanks again to Lauren for joining us. All her information is at laurengreutman.com, and her podcast, check it out. It's called the Hard Money Talks podcast. I'll be on the show this month as well. Thanks for tuning in everybody, and I hope your day is So Money.

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