

**EPISODE 1391**

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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 1391, building a comedy career on TikTok, with actor and comedian, Leah Rudick.

*“**LR:** Did you know that not everybody has 12 luxury cars. Some people don't even have one. Can you believe it? Apparently, to get around, they take something that is like a party bus but just without the party. I said to my assistant, 'Book me one of those buses. Have them come to the state and pick me up.' She said, 'Buses don't come to you. You go to them.' How coy.”*

[INTRO]

[00:01:03]

**FT:** Welcome to So Money, everybody. Some comedy relief today on the show. You're just hearing a snippet of one of the hilarious viral videos performed by our guest today, Leah Rudick. It is from a series of TikTok and Instagram reels that she entitles Wealthy woman, and Wealthy woman is an overzealous rich lady who likes to go online and talk about her many experiences, doing kind of basic things like going to the DMV, going on a cruise, renting an apartment, taking the bus.

I first discovered Leah on Instagram just a few weeks ago. I could not stop watching and sharing her witty, clever, and well-played performances. It's just a snapshot of her many talents. Leah is an actor and comedian based in Los Angeles. Her first standup special, Everything is Fine, can be seen on the Seed & Spark streaming platform. Her standup was featured in the most recent season of Comedy Dynamics Coming To The Stage, and she is a regular on the comedy festival, Circuit. Her favorite TV credits include HBO's High Maintenance, where she plays Isabel and IFC's Commuters. Her comedy and character videos have amassed over 10 million likes on TikTok and Instagram.

She and I talk about the behind the scenes of her fast climb to social media fandom, the career and financial opportunities that have stemmed from her viral videos, the business of comedy, and a lot more. Here's Leah Rudick.

[INTERVIEW]

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**FT:** Leah Rudick, welcome to So Money. If you could only see me. Well, you can see me. I'm beaming from cheek to cheek.

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**LR:** I'm so happy to be here. I'm also beaming and just delighted.

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**FT:** Well, let's give our audience some background. I don't know what happened. I was on Instagram. This is not always the beginning of a good story. Well, I was on Instagram, dot, dot, dot, and I fell upon – I think the algorithm really knows me and fed me some of your reels, where you are pretending to be, you call it, Wealthy woman and her travails, her adventures. Going to the DMV, going to a spring break party, taking a bus.

So it started there, and I immediately shared it with my audience because I was just like, if you watch one video today, let it be this because I just thought the best comedy I think is the kind where it's funny, but it's saying something. Of course, me being someone who is obsessed with personal finance and the economy, you really are speaking my language. So that's how we found each other, and I reached out to you, and you were quick to reply and so generous to come on. This was just a couple of weeks ago, so we moved fast.

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**LR:** We did. Yeah.

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**FT:** So many questions for you, Leah, before we get into the amazing reels you're making right now. But just your foray into comedy, I always am interested in the sort of the beginnings of that for people because I think it can be this unknown. We were talking about before we got on. Like there's no job listing for comedians. You really have to be entrepreneurial and make your own path. So ahead of knowing all of this, I'm sure you knew all this before you got into it, what made you want to still do it?

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**LR:** I started on the acting path, and comedy was a kind of offshoot of that. As I was auditioning and working to get hired by somebody else, comedy was something that I had control over. So I started in New York doing sketch comedy in these like rundown theaters deep in Brooklyn. It was just a creative outlet while I was like trying to make it big in the in the Shakespeare circuit.

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**FT:** Really, Shakespeare?

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**LR:** Well, that's what I – I was like a theater kid, and that's what I moved – I moved to New York and I was like, “I really want to want to do theater.” Then it just became the thing that like I really love doing it, and it kind of kept building upon itself.

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**FT:** You must have these ongoing conversations in your head about just like what's the business that I'm running. Where are my revenue streams? I'm sure with yours now under your belt,

you're seeing where the patterns and trends are. Like where's the money right now? Where is it best for you to be investing your time, Leah, as a creator?

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**LR:** I mean, it's TikTok and Instagram, and this is something that I feel like I've been like a struggling artist for over 15 years. Getting on these platforms has really completely changed my career trajectory and my life in a lot of ways. It's been really exciting these past couple of years. With having this platform and this outlet, I have a real audience for the first time.

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**FT:** How did you know what to perform on TikTok and Instagram? I'm personally loving these Wealthy women parodies. But also, you have the MLM mom. So much variety. When you were first starting out, how were you measuring your success?

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**LR:** Definitely trial and error. I was hesitant to get on TikTok. It was during the pandemic. My brother, who's also a comedian, was like, "You got to get on this app. It's like there's so much potential for growth." I was like, "I don't – TikTok is for kids." Then I got on, and I posted. I started posting standup clips at first. Then I think one of those got a little traction. Then you get addicted to the –

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**FT:** The likes and the views.

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**LR:** To the likes and the views. Eventually, I ran out of standup clips. So I was like, "I guess I'll just start playing around." I didn't feel like the Wealthy woman character and these newer characters. These are really newer characters in the past, I don't know, five months or so. It was

very much trial and error. As soon as I started with the Wealthy woman character, it was like exponential. I was like, “Okay, I think I'm onto something here. So let's ride this until –”

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**FT:** Well, I want to play a clip. I want to play a clip of the Wealthy woman. Which one's your favorite?

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**LR:** I like the bus, the riding the bus.

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**FT:** Yes. Okay. All right, pulling that up. Here is Wealthy woman rides the bus.

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**LR:** Did you know that not everybody has 12 luxury cars? Some people don't even have one. Can you believe it? Apparently to get around, they take something that is like a party bus but just without the party. I said to my assistant, “Book me one of those buses. Have them come to the state and pick me up.” She said, “Buses don't come to you. You go to them.” How coy.

So I took the helicopter downtown to something called a bus stop, which is really just a bench on a corner where sleepy people sit. And the bus comes, and the door opens, and they don't give you champagne or hot towel. The driver is there with a cup that says big gulp on it, and he says, “That'll be \$1.75.” So I hand him two hundreds, and I take a seat right up front, first class.

They have these chords on the side that you can ding for service. So I'm dinging the bell and dinging the bell, and I say, “Where is this waitress? I could really use a Nicoise salad.” The driver says, “Of course, ma'am. Would you like some caviar with that as well?” I say, “That would be delightful.” Then a man stands in front of me, takes his pants down, and does a number two, and says, “Here's your caviar right here.” I had no idea that's where it came from.

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**FT:** I love that she's really kind, and I feel like you could really take Wealthy woman and shake her down. Like you could really steal all her things, and she would be completely oblivious.

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**LR:** Totally. Also just like excited to, you know.

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**FT:** She's up for a good time.

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**LR:** She's up for a good time, and I feel like she's also like open to like becoming like political in the best way. She just doesn't know.

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**FT:** Do you watch The Real Housewives? It's not a far cry from some of these women who are just – I remember like this one woman. She was Real Housewives of Beverly Hills, and she's like, “Yeah. Sometimes, you have a house that you don't know like where it's located or like whatever. You have a lot of houses.” I was like, “Wow. Okay.” That must be a nice problem to have but also tragic, like if you don't actually know the location of your homes because you have so many of them.

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**LR:** Yeah. Deeply sad and deeply something to put on your vision board.

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**FT:** The fact that she's a wealthy woman versus like a wealthy man. I wonder what his reels would be like. What would be his experience on the bus? Would he be so patient? Would he be so open-minded? I don't know.

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**LR:** That's a great question. That's maybe the next incarnation of these. It's also interesting the way people – I haven't really build out a whole backstory for this woman. But a lot of people in the comments make a lot of assumptions about this woman being wealthy, only because her like her imaginary husband is. It's telling.

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**FT:** This could totally be an HBO series.

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**LR:** I'd love that.

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**FT:** Like who were her friends? Who's she taking with on the bus?

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**LR:** Yeah, yeah. Are they as oblivious? Are they – Because in my head, the friends are like The Real Housewives.

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**FT:** Right, right. How do you come up with your takes? What do you think it says about where the minds are right now? Do you think that like The Real Housewives is helping with the

popularity of these videos or the wealth gap, quite frankly, and just the sheer abomination that is the US economy and the division in wealth?

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**LR:** Absolutely. I think that's 1,000%. I think, also, people have really responded to this character being kind. I think there's like a trope of the wealthy person being oblivious but also being horrible. I think I made the decision to make this character deer in headlights oblivious but like with a heart of gold. I think that people are refreshed by that and sort of want to help this woman.

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**FT:** Yeah. She has this sort of optimism and this very sweet spirit that while she's completely out of touch, she's also somebody that you wouldn't mind having over for dinner because you just never know what she's going to say, and her interpretation of the world, the lens through which she sees the world, is something else.

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**LR:** Yes, absolutely. Yeah.

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**FT:** You're also anti-MLM. I saw a video where you kind of took down Sheryl Sandberg, like there was some shade over Sheryl Sandberg. So what is Lead Rudick's – Is this your political commentary or just sort of your deep thoughts coming out?

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**LR:** It's not intentionally. I'm not intentionally trying to push buttons or intentionally be political. I think it comes out because it is just I see these things in the world. They, I guess, inspire me to



write comedy about it. But it's not like I'm trying to like get on a soapbox. I think that's something that happens as a result of it but –

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**FT:** You almost can't help it. Yeah. You said something earlier about the TikTok and the social media platforms really taking your career to the next level. Can you give us some examples of that those connections, like the – I went on TikTok, and I have all these millions of followers or millions of views. How that has actually materialized into real work that pays you.

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**LR:** Yeah. Well, I've always been a live performer. I've always done live comedy, and this has just opened up a lot of opportunities. I'm now like going into next month and co-headlining shows with my brother all over the Midwest. It's been really wild to go and do these shows and have people come and be like, “I follow you on social media.”

Like I said, I've been, I feel like, trudging along for 15 years, and it feels like for the first time I'm actually – My work is getting seen, and I'm getting paid doing shows, also like earning money through the various platforms through their creative fun bonuses and all that. It feels like it's just the beginning. Like it feels like – There's been reach outs for brand deals and –

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**FT:** What advice would you have given yourself 15 years ago? Would you have changed anything about the choices that you made or the way that you approached comedy as a business and acting? Acting, I guess, as a business too.

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**LR:** Definitely. I mean, I tend to believe that everything happens in the right time and the time it's supposed to. But I certainly wouldn't have shied away from social media so much. I think I would have told myself like, “Get on YouTube. What are you doing?” There are these platforms

that can push you out to a broader audience, and I think there was always this like, “Oh, well, that's – I'm an artist. I don't need that.” But you can be an artist in any platform, and I don't think that maybe I didn't need to struggle financially so much all those years.

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**FT:** Well, can we go to those years? When I have comedians on and anyone who's in the creative space, to talk a little bit about their financial experiences because we know when you are self-employed, and especially in a creative space, the income is not consistent. As one of my friends likes to say, you eat what you kill. What was it like for you in the beginning, and how were you making ends meet?

I was just talking to somebody again, who was like, “I feel like I have to choose either working a corporate job or becoming an actor and taking side gigs.” Like there's no way to have financial stability with benefits and try to pursue acting. What was it like for you, and do you think that's actually really true? Or can you find other ways to do it?

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**LR:** Well, I mean, in my experience, I worked as a waitress for years, and I babysat, and I worked as like assistance to wealthy people, which is where a lot of that –

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**FT:** Aha. You were getting your – You were studying. Yes.

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**LR:** A lot of the inspo comes from. To be completely transparent, I have very supportive parents, who in those moments where I was like, “I can't pay my rent this month,” would come through and save me. I don't think I would have been able to stay on this track without that because it's like having a – People do have like nine-to-five corporate jobs, but you have to be able to like have flexibility to leave for an audition or to go and do gigs on the road.

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**FT:** Yeah. I mean, I've had a little bit of experience in comedy, meaning I took a class. I did a few standup nights in New York City. Therefore, heretofore I am now a comedian. No. But what I observed was I thought to myself, well, the reason women could never compete in this space for the longest time because the economy of comedy was such where you had to travel to these small comedy clubs, these bars throughout the country, usually, like an 11 o'clock show. You made 150 bucks, maybe. I mean, what man can do that, let alone what woman who probably has responsibilities at home, children, taking care of her family, and then, also, now as a woman to be in that environment with all these men? That's also challenging, so it was never like built for women.

Do you think that that's – That has changed, for sure. Obviously, we're talking. But what is the state of comedy today, as far as the gender divide?

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**LR:** I think it's changing for the better, for sure. It's changed a lot in a positive way in the past two decades. But it's still, for sure, 100%. There is still, I think, an underbelly of toxicity there. But I think as more women get involved in the space, it gets better. Last month, I opened for Maria Bamford, who is like one of my comedy heroes. That was really like eye-opening to see the way she really like brings female comedians up with her and makes it feel like a safe, inclusive environment. I feel like it's people like that that are paving the way, that are making space for everyone, for all women.

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**FT:** How has the streaming world enhanced comedy and also the role of women in comedy? Now, you see so many more specials. What's the process to getting a special, a Netflix special, or any show special?

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**LR:** That's a great question. I would love to know the answer to that.

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**FT:** Well, what's on your what's on your 2023 vision board?

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**LR:** I mean, yeah, that. Yeah. Like late night sets.

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**FT:** Do they still do those? Like you can get on? That's great.

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**LR:** Yeah. I think that that FAT format is definitely like in its sunset hours. But it's still there. But, yeah, I would love a Netflix special. I would love an HBO special.

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**FT:** I think you could so be on The Daily Show. I mean, I don't know what you think of that but –

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**LR:** I would love that.

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**FT:** Like your Wealthy woman and your other parodies and your comedy sketches that maybe you don't intentionally try to make them commentary-focused, but you are addressing the politics of the day, and whether you know it or not. I think that that is – The subtlety in what you

do is just so powerful and would carry us over so well to a show like The Daily Show, where you would go and interview people, and bring your own like humor to it. I don't know. That's my dream for you.

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**LR:** I love that. Thank you for saying that. I really appreciate that. I think I've always been kind of intimidated by that bold comedy, but I've always loved it and found it incredibly brave. So it means a lot that you perceive that.

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**FT:** Yeah, like a Samantha Bee. I really see that. What's your advice? I mean, you kind of talked about your own advice that you would give yourself. But starting out now in 2022, are we in a recession? I don't know. Like how is that even – Do you think that even affects comedians and the opportunities that you have? Are you recession-proof is what, I guess, I'm trying to find out.

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**LR:** Oh, God. I hope so. That would be nice. I don't know the answer to that. I think that, for me, for so long, it's just been like living month to month that like it's hard to think in those terms. I'm just trying to figure it out.

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**FT:** Walk us through how you put together a Wealthy woman script. What is the production like that? To really know the effort that goes behind it, I would love for you to talk a little bit about that, the energy and time and work that goes into each one of these very successful viral videos.

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**LR:** Oh, yeah. Thank you. There's a formula to it, right? It's like there are beats within each one, and they're kind of consistent beats. So it really is just like picking a theme, like just brainstorming. Okay, what are things that this person who has been so sheltered would have never experienced riding a bus, going to a dive bar? Then just like playing within that space and just kind of like – I have a 60-page Google Doc, where I just brainstorm and just kind of write lines as they occur to me. It would be funny if she did this, and then this thing happened, and then this thing happened. They're just like little stories, little like bite-sized stories.

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**FT:** You mentioned that your brother is also in the industry. Are you around the same age? Do you share notes? Like how has it been having someone so close to you come up in the business with you?

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**LR:** It's been amazing. We are super close. He's three years younger than me, and we've always been super close. We live in different places. He lives in the Midwest and has been doing standup in the Midwest for over a decade and has kind of really etched out his own space in that part of the country. It's been amazing. We bounce ideas off of each other. Sometimes, we do video collabs, and we're going to go on – We do a lot of shows together because I'll go to the Midwest and stay with my family.

But we have this like tour coming up, where we're co-headlining all of these spaces, and it's really nice to have like a buddy in a space that can often be isolating, I think.

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**FT:** For sure. I mean, comedy and traveling, and you hear about some of the – Of course, like Jim Gaffigan putting his entire family on a bus, all the kids and the wife and everybody traveling together to go. I don't know. I guess that's one solution, but that's got to be a lot of chaos.

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**LR:** I feel like Ali Wong does that as well, like brings the kids, the very young kids. I guess when you hit a certain point where you just have the financial stability to be able to do that, you can bring nannies.

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**FT:** Yeah. I guess the – Yeah. You can bring the Wealthy woman’s staff. I wonder, do you see this industry is like being sort of – You said formulaic and more talking about your reels and your scripts. But in some ways, the business too can be formulaic maybe, in that if you get enough followers and enough of an online crowd that's coming straight to you. It's only a matter of time, and you've experienced this already, where like brands come to you, and maybe the studios come to you. I know.

I love Sebastian Maniscalco, I feel like he came out of obscurity. But, no, I mean, he was just sort of quietly building his audience, going from show to show to show online and then the Netflix specials. I think it's almost like if you stick it out for long enough and you stay consistent, it's got to work out, right?

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**LR:** That's what I feel, and I'm seeing a result. It's been a very long road, and it is really refreshing and wonderful to start seeing results. So I'm kind of just taking it a day at a time and seeing what other doors this can lead to and open up. It's been really exciting.

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**FT:** You are so fun to watch. Also, at the same time, I'm so thrilled for the direction of your career because what I see too in you is a woman who is taking her career in her own hands, not waiting for the opportunities to arrive, but constantly creating your own stuff. The people are coming. You are attracting people. I'll be there in the front row of your Netflix special and if I can help with The Daily Show. I don't know. My dream is to be on Dancing with the Stars.

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**LR:** Oh, my gosh. Yes.

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**FT:** Whenever they have a podcast category like today, this season.

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**LR:** That will happen. I feel like that must happen.

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**FT:** Yeah. It's going to happen. It's going to happen. Your lips to God's ear, it will happen. Leah Rudick, thank you so much for just making my day.

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**LR:** Thank you so much. You made my day. This was so fun and wonderful.

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**FT:** I would love to see you in person when you perform in the New York, New Jersey area, in the tri state area. Please let us know. Until then, we will see you on all the grams and the reels in the TikToks of the world.

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**LR:** Yay, amazing. Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]



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**FT:** Thanks so much to Leah for joining us. You can check out all of her work with the links I've provided in our show notes, Instagram, TikTok. Her website is leahrudick, R-U-D-I-C-K,.com. Please check her out. She will definitely put a smile on your face.

Stay tuned for Friday's episode of Ask Farnoosh, where we're going to launch a special segment in our Friday shows called Recession Help Desk. This is part of a theme that we are bringing to our audiences all over the place, from the CNET Money audience to the podcast and my newsletter. We're going to be dedicating special advice every week to help you navigate this. I don't know. Can we call it a recession? I don't really care. The majority of Americans feel like it's recessionary right now, and I'm not going to wait to give a good advice. Until then, I hope your day is So Money.

[END]