

EPISODE 1601

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FT: So Money episode 1601, money, dating, and finding yourself with Eli Rallo, author of *I Didn't Know I Needed This*.

ER: *Nobody really feels like an adult or feels like they have everything together. People are just like cosplaying that idea or faking that idea. And with that in mind, you could always just start over and try something new. Like it's never too late for a first date. It's never too late to explore your passions."*

[INTRO]

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FT: Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. Firstly, thank you to everybody who's been filling out my survey. A lot of you want to get a free copy of *A Healthy State of Panic* signed, I might add. I'm giving away five free copies of my book, my new book, for those who enter to win. To do so, just follow the link in these show notes. It's the first link you're going to see when you click on the episode notes in your podcast player. I'm just going to ask a few questions about you, how you engage with the show, what you want to learn more about. At the end, leave your name if you'd like to be considered for a free copy of my book.

My guest today is a forthcoming author herself. Eli Rallo has a new book out next week. It's called *I Didn't Know I Needed This*. The book is a to-do list of self-appreciation and validation and answers to questions like who texts first after the first date. What am I supposed to do with a broken heart? The author, Eli Rallo, is a fast-rising star on social media and an accomplished writer. The book, she says, is her scripture. She's shared pieces of this book in three-minute videos and Instagram stories. But the book, *I Didn't Know I Needed This*, is going to give the rules for how to use your voice, how to fall in love with yourself, and truthful ways that you can be fulfilled and invigorated.

Eli is 25 years old. I love learning from her. She is wise and kind and curious. Here, Eli open up about her financial life, the work ethic that was instilled in her at a young age, and why writing is at the root of her multi-platform business. Here's Eli Rallo.

[INTERVIEW]

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FT: Eli Rallo, welcome to So Money. I am returning the huge favor that you gave me, having me on your podcast, Miss Congeniality.” But, woman, you have a lot ahead. You are currently social media star with a huge following on TikTok and Instagram, host of the Miss Congeniality podcast. You and I both went to Columbia, got our graduate degrees in journalism. You have a book coming out very soon, which I want to talk about as well.

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ER: I know.

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FT: How are you doing? It's almost the holidays. Your book's coming out. I mean, let's do a temperature check. How's Eli doing?

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ER: I love a temperature check. I'm doing pretty well. We were just saying before we started recording that like everybody always says like debut authors have no idea what's going on, and learning about publishing is so nuts because it's such like a gate-kept industry. But I feel like for once in this whole process, not knowing is so helpful because it's giving me this freedom to just like be – ignorance is bliss. I have no idea how it's going to feel on pub day or all of the days after that. I like that idea because it's really unexpected, but there's also just like no way for me to truly understand what it is. So I'm just kind of like flying by the seat of my pants right now,

taking it one day at a time, and like trying to savor the moments before because I know that like on that day, a lot's going to change. I'm sure you, of course, know that as well.

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FT: Yes. But like I said, it's all good. There's always a lot of uncertainty on the other side of launching anything, anything creative especially, but a book, too. I mean, it's such a vulnerable thing also to put out in the world. Your advice, we're going to get into it, is about mostly living in your 20s to the fullest, dating, relationships, mental health. I also want to learn more about your comeuppance. You're in your – you're 20 – are you 25 yet?

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ER: Twenty-five.

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FT: You have. So you had your quarter-life crisis already.

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ER: Yes. It's behind me. It's in the past.

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FT: It's in the past. I've moved on. But your foray into becoming who you are today, as I mentioned, social media influencer, was sort of an accident. I want to get into that story. First, I was learning a little bit about you online, as we do now about – that's how we learn about people. I was reading on Medium. You were interviewed earlier this year. Something that really resonated with me and I thought was really respectful was that you described your first career as a writer. A lot of people will call you social media influencer, creator. For you, you are a writer first, creator second. As I mentioned, we're fellow journalism students, graduates, so we get it.

But tell our audience why, for you, writing is so foundational to the work that you produce and how it actually propels your brand and your business. I love how we can go back to like something as basic as writing and have that be a foundation for building something magnanimous.

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ER: Thank you. I really appreciate you picking that out. I think it's like a surprise to nobody that I'm not really like an influencer in the traditional sense of the term. I'm not saying that is a bad thing. In fact, I envy people that are like that, people that are either just like have such a beautiful like foundation to put like makeup on their face and have such like a gift and an art for beauty or a gift and an art for fashion. People will watch their videos and be like, "I need to dress like her," or, "I need to do my makeup like her." That is like influencer in the traditional sense of the term, and it used to really frustrate me that I was not good at those things.

Even these days, I have my core community and audience, my big fans, who they want to see the fashion content and the beauty content because they like me as a person. So they would like to see those things, how I do them in my own life. But as a whole, on the Internet, I am not known for the typical influencer things. That used to upset me and frustrate me because I would just feel like, well, I'm not beautiful enough, and I don't fit society's idea of like what that kind of person should be.

But then I reflected on it and I realized that the content that I am known for on the Internet all has the foundation and the basis of creative creation and writing. I would not be a good theater artist in the way that I feel that I am if I wasn't a writer. I wouldn't be a good communicator and a good journalist and good at hosting podcasts if I wasn't a good writer. When I write my layouts for doing podcasts, it's like they always look like scripts. That's what's ingrained in me. It's not so much like, "Oh, let me like write out these interview questions." But it's like, "Let me write out a script to navigate this conversation." A lot of times, it's just always been the writing. I think for a while, I took that for granted because I wanted to fit the mold a little bit better than I do.

Now, looking back on it, I'm grateful that I've been able to have this growth and recognize, no, I'm a writer first, and that's okay. Not everybody on the internet needs to be a creator first, and

it's okay if you're not. It's also okay you are. I never want to sound like I'm patronizing someone or putting them down because they are a creator first. Again, I envy them. When I say that I'm in a rabbit hole on TikTok, it's because I'm obsessed with watching people who are creators first. I love watching people like Monet McMichael who's just like a creator. She's amazing on TikTok. The content she creates is like beyond anything I could ever conceive creating. I would hope that someone like her might say the writing that this person does is beyond anything I could do.

It's special when we can look at each other and say, "Here are your strengths. Here are mine." That's really important to me. So I think that saying that I'm a writer first is just like a realization that I needed to have but that I always knew. Now, I'm much more comfortable and confident with it. Obviously, the book, it doesn't hurt.

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FT: It doesn't hurt. The book is called *I Didn't Know I Needed This*, which I want to get into very quickly. It's the title itself, too, I'm very curious about. How did you decide what you wanted to be known for and appreciated for? As we mentioned, you're still growing up in your 20s and figuring stuff out. People always ask me like, "How did you decide you wanted to be a personal finance expert?" I'm like, "Oh, yes. I dreamt about it." No, I didn't. It just kind of like I experimented with it, and I liked it, and it kind of took off, and I was lucky in some ways.

How have you decided where you're going to show up for people in their lives and what kind of advice you want to give them?

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ER: I don't want to sound passive in saying this, but I sort of let them decide for me. I think that's what's really special about my relationship to my community is that they created all of this for me. Now, in my personal life and throughout my life, like I was always writing about sex and dating. I was always giving advice. I pitched a column to the Michigan Daily, which is one of the largest college newspapers in the country. I wrote for the magazine. I loved magazine journalism. I said I want to write a column by a woman for women and those who identify as

women, just talking about things that we don't talk about, and they said yes. The editors at the Daily said yes.

That was like my first foray into doing something like that. I felt so like right in doing that, but I really didn't know how to get from there to like here. I think it's really interesting that that's what I do now, and it's interesting that I was able to recognize this is how I feel right. But I didn't show up on the Internet and take up that space until people gave that space to me and like helped me form it. What I mean by that is back when I hit 10,000 followers on Instagram, I'm not sure if it's the same today, I got access to the little question box. I saw a lot of other influencers using the question box. I was so excited to get access to it. I was pumped.

Obviously, I was very much a micro-influencer at that point on Instagram, and I started putting it up, and I started saying, "Ask me anything, how I saw other creators doing it." I expected people were going to be like, "What is your favorite like place to shop for this, and what shampoo do you use, and like how are you doing today, and like tell us about your life." It was the exact opposite. No one gave a fuck about my shampoo. It was like, "What do I do if I bled all over this guy's sheets? How do I deal with a broken heart? My mom just told me that she's going through this thing, and I don't know how to handle it. I'm in a fight with my sister, and we haven't talked in weeks. How do I get through it?" I realized that it wasn't that people thought that I had the wisdom. It was that people, number one, thought that I had the words and, number two, recognized me as somebody that they felt truly cared for them.

When a lot of people ask me what gives you the agency to give advice, my response to that would be what gives your best friend or your mom or your favorite person in the world the agency to give you advice when you're going through something, and you call them up. Nothing. They don't have a degree. They don't have some crazy brain or wisdom. What they really have is a perspective that you respect and that you appreciate, and you know that they love and care for you. So you're looking for their advice for those reasons.

I found that in thinking that through and realizing that, it's really special to me that my community feels that way about me. That's something that they gave me, and that's a space that they've carved out for me, that we've carved out together. I think that it's important when you're taking up any sort of space on the Internet because I do have space on the Internet, and

I do have a small corner of it. That, of course, you're like self-actualizing and putting yourself out there and going after what it is that you want to do online yourself. But also letting people give you that space as well because then, it just feels a little bit more natural, and I feel like you build a better trust with your community. So I hope that answered the question that you asked because I went a bit –

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FT: It did. It did, and I have follow-up questions, which means you gave a good answer. I think it's important for the audience to know the timeline, right? So you mentioned you had this column at University of Michigan. You had three months left to go till graduation, and then COVID hit. When you look back at that time frame, what was the meaning in it for you, now that you have hindsight?

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ER: It's weird because a lot of my peers were justifiably very distraught, upset, and depressed. I was very distraught, upset, and depressed to say goodbye to my best friend. That was really difficult for me because we knew that we probably weren't going to end up in the same city. I write about her in the book, and most of the reviews of the book have mentioned her because they thought that the parts that I wrote about her are like the most beautiful and the most important. That was the upsetting thing to me.

But leaving school, I didn't feel this like great distress and I'm not – again, I want to make sure that everybody knows that if you did feel that way, that's okay. Plenty of people in my life, my boyfriend, other friends of mine felt so incredibly distressed and depressed that their college career ended in that way. For me, I felt at peace a little bit. I definitely like didn't want to go and move home. But there was something that was like kind of grateful for my health, my life, my family.

Also, I talked about this a little bit recently with another person who interviewed me, but not a lot of people know that. My dad owns restaurants, small family-run businesses. They stayed open throughout the pandemic, so I worked every single day. Now, a lot of people, I don't think, knew

that because this was before I was doing TikTok at like a large volume. I didn't even really talk about it on TikTok because it just opens a can of worms to explain like everything that was going on, and things were changing on a daily basis for business owners at the time. One of our restaurants had to close due to the pandemic. It was just a really stressful time, but I worked every day.

My POV during the pandemic did not look like scrolling Netflix and sitting inside, though, I wish it did. It looked like I was in a restaurant with nine other people every day, and we were the only 10 people in the restaurant trying to run a business. Down the street, my brothers were in a restaurant with 10 other people. Then down the street, my parents were in a restaurant with 10 other people. Those were like our COVID employee bubbles, the people that were like still employed during the pandemic for us. Obviously, having one family member at each spot was definitely helpful for my dad, and it was really a no-brainer. We were all just like, "We're going to work. We're going to help. This is what we do."

I think that that was really interesting because now I'm very big on gut instincts and I just felt – I don't know. I felt like something was coming. I definitely felt like I knew I was going to grad school in August. But I just felt like something was about to shift. I felt a tremendous amount of grief and pain for the state of our country and our world. But on a personal level, I felt a lot of gratitude for my family, my life, my health, the fact that we were able to keep the businesses open, and things of that nature. So it was definitely strange when I went viral on TikTok, and it was like, "What is happening?"

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FT: Yes. Let's talk about that. I want to mention – so you brought it up, trail mix. Tell me about the trail mix, trailgate.

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ER: Trailgate.

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FT: Trail mix, Trailgate.

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ER: Trail mix, Trailgate. Basically, I had TikTok since like my senior year of college. But it was very much so like not for my age demographic at that point. But I liked watching it because I thought it was really funny, sort of in like a way that I thought Vine was really funny and sort of like captivating. I was making videos on private and sending them to my friends, just things to make people laugh and like feel good during times where they were depressed and feeling anxious and struggling.

Then one day, my brothers and I were like fooling around. We're like, "Let's fill up this jar of trail mix that we used to fill up when we were kids and put it on private and put a funny sound and then send it to all of our friends who remember this nostalgic thing from when we were kids." I accidentally just put it on public. I don't even know. That was a total mistake. I didn't want to do that. I didn't want people to know I was posting on TikTok. It went pretty viral.

Then I remember the next day, I went to work, and I was manning the phone because we were doing delivery and takeout only. I was sitting at the phone on my phone while there was like a lull in service. I made a video explaining like my family and like what this like trail mix was and what it meant to us and like just being silly about it. That video went even more viral. So I realized like using my personality and a voice-over and talking super-fast, which is something that a lot of people say that I do on TikTok now, was attractive to the audience that I had sort of collected in 24 hours. So then, slowly but surely, balloon effect as it does, and that was that.

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FT: Oh, my gosh. That was that and just like that.

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ER: Just like that.

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FT: People actually called you the Carrie Bradshaw of TikTok. What does that – how does that make you feel?

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ER: Honestly, it's really weird for a variety of reasons. I would say like I grew up with the show. Obviously, we all find Carrie a little bit annoying and like a big complainer. But if I had to pick like somebody out in the world, some fictional character that was doing something that I wanted to do, it would have been her. The other day, I actually met Sarah Jessica Parker for the first time.

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FT: I saw that.

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ER: We were like kind of friendly because she like sent me a pair of shoes with a handwritten letter over the summer, and that made me realize that she knew who I was. Surely, that's because, well, not only my massive fan and like to a degree. But, also, I think like a lot of people have called me that before in big publications as well. So I think that that's likely how she knew who I was.

But when I met her in person, we just had this really lovely conversation. I told her that she had like the most recognizable voice for me. It's like so crazy because like Sex and the City is really my comfort show. We talked for a little bit. Then she was really just like almost like giving me her blessing, which was really beautiful and special for me and a really wonderful, crazy, full-circle moment that almost made me feel a little bit more comfortable with people calling me that because I was like, "Okay, this is the person that like made that a thing," like together with Candace Bushnell and, of course, showrunners and producers and whatnot. But like the iconic Carrie Bradshaw is Sarah Jessica Parker. Even in her life, we see the ways that playing that

role sort of has reverberated into her actual life with like her own shoe brand, and a lot of her personal style, and even with like she has an imprint. She publishes like books for authors. She's very like literary and into writing.

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FT: Oh, she's huge. Yes. She's such a fantastic, well-rounded, interesting human.

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ER: So interesting.

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FT: I hope the world gets to do more of that side of her. I mean, she has done several interviews. Whenever she's on any talk show, I just feel like I could listen to her talk forever.

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ER: She's amazing, well-spoken, so well-spoken.

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FT: So your forthcoming book is called *I Didn't Know I Needed This*, which follows the natural life cycle of dating, starting out with being a singleton and flirting and all that adrenaline and then, of course, the app navigations. Then it gets a little bit more into you're serious now, or you're thinking about becoming serious. There's sex. There's falling in love. There's managing the relationship and then, of course, the heartache and the heartbreak, closure, how to prioritize your friends, honor your life.

Okay, first of, what is the story behind the title? I always like to ask authors about their title process.

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ER: So when we were trying to come up with the title, and I say we, it was myself and my two literary agents. We were just having a meeting, and my one agent was like, “We should comb through all your DMs. And like while you comb through your DMs, we’ll comb through your comment sections on viral videos, and let’s try to see like what the through lines are.” So we all wrote down the through lines that like came up a bunch of times in comments and DMs. Then the one that we liked the best was *I Didn’t Know I Needed This*.

What I think is so special about that, something that makes me feel really like excited, is that I’ve been telling my community and my audience like, “This is our book.” From day one, this is not something that is just mine. Like without you, this would not even be a thing. This is our book. The fact that they named the book makes it feel even more like something that is ours. That’s really special and exciting to me about the title. I love the title. We’re working on a pitch for my second book right now, and I’m like the title will never compare. Whatever I name it, the second book, it’s not going to be *I Didn’t Know I Needed This*, which is like such a special title to me.

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FT: You’re already thinking about the next book. You have a topic?

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ER: Yes. I can’t give too much away, but I think thinking along the lines of the first book just a bit more sort of like how my audience grows with me as my mind sort of pulls away from thinking a lot about like early relationships and dating and flirting and sort of like the book that I needed when I was 18, 19, 20, 21, 22. Not that the book is just for those people, but I feel like that was the book I needed then.

This would more so be the book that I needed when I was 22, 23, 24, 25 even. So it just would follow different themes, different things that I’ve been like about and focusing on more. Then also different things that I’ve been communicating with my audience about because we talk a lot, and I do have my finger on the pulse of like what a lot of women ages 18 to 35 are going

through right now because that's my audience, and they share those things with me, and I can pick out things that I feel like are common. It's kind of going to be a little bit like that, so very exciting. But the title, it will never compare. The debut's title is always going to be really special.

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FT: That's cool. I know but you'll figure it out. It always feels that way. You'll figure it out in the shower or something.

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ER: You're so right.

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FT: Or you'll just crowd-source it. You'll crowd-source it again, and it'll be a hit.

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ER: Yes.

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FT: In my generation, Eli, and probably it was also cultural, I'm Iranian, there was a lot of emphasis when it came to dating on – well, my mom used to say like, “You can date when you're married. First, you need to invest in yourself, and then you need to get educated. You need to save your money. You need to become someone. You need to build a life for yourself,” which I appreciate.

But then this idea that like love is just going to be waiting for you when you're ready is not realistic because as you know, life nor love is linear. So I want to get your advice for those who are still single and looking for love but also trying to balance that with investing in themselves because we all know that the best relationships are the ones where each person really knows

themselves. So how do you like build the ship while you're flying it? How do you build the love ship while you're figuring out yourself? I know you're in a committed relationship. What's your advice? The semblance of this question must come up a lot in your community.

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ER: It definitely does. I think something that I notice and something that I really reject is this idea of black-and-white thinking, this binary that it's either you're dating, and you're looking for a partner, and you're going on dates every week, and you have your to-dos, and you know how you have to find that person, and this is how you're going to do it. Or you're focusing on you. You're single. You're focusing on your friends. It's like this crazy binary where you're either Samantha from Sex and the City or you're Charlotte. There's no place to be both of them or like be on the in-between.

What I – the advice that I always give is you don't need to be intentionally dating every single week, like scrolling the apps, obsessing and making it your number one priority. But instead you should live like I told you your soulmate was going to show up knock on your door one year from today, November 14th, 2024. What would you do in that year? Well, firstly, you would take the pressure off dating, and you would just have fun. You would like go on dates. Maybe you would have some like crazy nights or one-night stands. You would let people approach you at the bar because you would think to yourself like, “I'm getting wifed up, locked in, tied down in one year. So I might as well get this out of my system being fun, prioritizing what I like to do, going out with my friends.” If I meet someone at the bar, sure, I'll go on a date with you. But it doesn't really matter because my soulmate's on the way.

Obviously, your soulmate's not actually coming a year from today. But when you start practicing that mindset, that's when you actually find the person because the truth is when you're living a very full beautiful life, that's when human beings – humans are like magnets. So that's when people are going to see you and be like, “Oh, my God. I'm literally magnetically drawn to you. You're living this like full, beautiful, colorful, exciting life.” In no way did you swear off dating. You just sort of like rejiggered how everything was looking. Now, people are just coming to you in flocks, whether that's even friends, opportunities, lovers, no matter what. Because you're living this life that people are interested by and they're excited by.

I think that that's really like the advice that I always give. I have a lot of girls that will come and be like, "I did that and I literally met my boyfriend who I'm now engaged to," or whatever else like five months later. Or I met my girlfriend, my partner, whoever it is. I started living like that, and I didn't even realize how much better my life got because it was no longer this like weird pressure to almost like a to-do list. Like, "Okay, I have to find a partner, and then I can do this." It was just like I'm living a life I like, and now there are people coming my way. So that's probably the advice that I would give for the most part.

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FT: And apps. What's your read on apps? I mean, how did you meet your partner, and what's your advice if people feel exhausted by the tech-driven dating resources?

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ER: I'm also, again, very much so not into the binary about apps. There are people who are like, "I hate the apps, and I'm not using them. I'm meeting somebody in person." There are people who like love the apps, and they only want to use the apps. They think they can't find someone without the apps. I think using both and balancing it is really important because at the end of the day, especially in a post-COVID world, like we're finding jobs online. We're doing job interviews online. We're finding communities online. Part of dating is going to be on the Internet, but not all of it has to be.

I actually met my boyfriend because I matched with a friend of his on a dating app, and the friend and I never met up. It didn't really like click or anything, but we kept in touch via social media. A year after we matched, he set me up with my boyfriend. So without the app, we never would have met. But it was more of a natural way of meeting because it was technically a setup. I think it's just some things like that do come out of the apps.

My little brother and his girlfriend, another great example. This is a really big thing on college campuses. But they knew each other because we grew up together. They went to college together, had completely lost touch, didn't really know each other at all, matched on the app,

didn't know like, "Are we matching on the app to be like, 'Ha, ha, see you there. Whatever.'" Or we're matching because we're both interested.

It paves this opportunity, and it sort of paves the way for you to develop romantic or sexual relationships with people that you wouldn't have otherwise because it's awkward. Or like what is he going to do, the family friend from 10 years ago who he hasn't spoken to in so many years like slide into her DMs or like text her? I guess he could, but this facilitated this really easy way for them to be like, "I see you. I think I'd be interested in this." Now, they live together. They've been together for almost two years.

It's like things like that that I feel like don't sleep on the apps for those little tiny strange ways that they make connections. You don't have to just rely on the apps. But I'm also not big into the people who swear them totally off. I think if you are going to be someone who's like swearing off the apps, you got to keep your complaints to a minimum because it does lessen the playing field. You have a way more massive opportunity to find somebody if you're opening yourself up to that. Are there shitty things about the apps? 100%. Do you have to sort of like get through the weeds? Yes. But one could say the same about the real world. I think that my big thing is if you are going to swear off the apps, just recognize it might be a little bit more difficult for you and be okay with that really.

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FT: Yes. I mean, as you were saying, like the apps, it expands your – it widens your net, but it also widens your net. Then comes decision fatigue and people feeling like they don't have to commit. That's a big problem.

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ER: It's tough.

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FT: When I was on your podcast, is it The Miss Congeniality or just Miss Congeniality?

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ER: It's Miss Congeniality. But the Instagram is @themisscongeniality because, of course, Miss Congeniality was taken.

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FT: Did Sandra Bullock take that?

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ER: Yes, I think she did. Well, we talked about money. You brought it up, which I was grateful for. I want to turn the question around to you and ask you as a 20-something who's coming into money and success. What are some of the financial stressors that you no longer have but the new ones that have arrived?

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ER: That's a really good question, and I honestly like haven't been asked or talked a lot about money in my whole like Internet career, other than like recognizing the immense privilege I have coming from a family that was able to pay my way through college. I think I'm really lucky that while growing up, my parents definitely taught my brothers more about finances. We all learned about hard work and having a work ethic. Again, very, very grateful that financial struggle was not something that I grew up around or grew up understanding.

That being said, I did grow up in a time where my dad came into money. So my dad was always owning restaurants. He went to law school, but his dad owned small businesses, and he took the businesses from like here to here, for those not watching that or not seeing that clip basically from one level to a completely different level with a wine business and more restaurants and books and all these sorts of other things. That happened when I was a child, and I really value like hard work because of that.

Also, the minute we turned 16, there wasn't an allowance. It was work. You have to work in the restaurants if you want money to go see your friends or do anything else. Same thing in college, if I wanted spending money, I had to work. So I worked in college as well. I'm really, really grateful that my parents said that those were our rules because I never – I really did realize and recognize the value of money and also working for it myself in restaurants. I babysat. I did like freelance theater work in college. The newspaper paid us a little bit. But I was always working.

Then the other thing was that my dad's rule was that if we wanted to go to higher education, graduate school, we had to pay for that ourselves. That was another lesson that I had to navigate and figure out. I think that definitely living in New York City and sort of being cut off when I graduate college, and I moved in August of 2020 with savings that I had from working in college and also working in the restaurant and postgrad and like money that I had just saved for rent and whatnot. I nannied and I tutored to sort of like bolster that. Then I also had the student loans.

Now, the one thing I want to recognize is that I had the “safety net.” If I had \$0.00, I don't have parents that are saying, “We don't have anything to give you,” or, “We're not giving it to you.” I had that all along. So that's definitely a privilege that sort of negates any sort of financial stress that I was feeling because despite the fact that I was working several jobs while I'm in school to be able to afford living in New York, I also knew that at the end of the day, even though my parents wouldn't give me money if I just like asked for it, that if I was struggling or if I was in a moment of strife or if I had a problem, they would pay. They would give me money. They had money to give me. I think that's really important to recognize and acknowledge.

I think that something crazy, though, is that when you say that you're going to be creative, whether you're going to go into theater, the arts, writing, journalism, all the things that I had always had passions for, people tell you that you're never going to make money. You sort of resolve to the fact that you're not going to make money. People told me my whole life, people in the theater, “Nobody goes to the theater to make money.” I didn't care about that. But in my brain, I always thought to myself I was always going to be the artist. I was always going to be the person that like wasn't bringing home the big bucks because I cared more about my passions. I wanted to do journalism and writing and theater, regardless.

I think there's a bit of a shift in when you find a massive amount of success in a creative field because people tell you for 25 years, you're going to make zero dollars doing that. Then you start making a lot of money doing that, and you're like, "Whoa." I think that was definitely an interesting thing because I really like – to no fault of anyone in my life, but everyone acted like I was just going to be like the artist whose dad needed to potentially save her from shit situations for the rest of her life.

I can confidently say that I've been financially independent since graduating college in 2020. I paid off my student loans in one payment by myself. I pay for my phone bill. I don't take any money from my parents anymore. Again, if I got into a shitty situation, I could. But I've been –

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FT: You don't want to ask.

[00:32:29]

ER: I don't want to ask. Yes. I don't want to have to get there but I always could. I always have that safety net that people point out, that a lot of influencers don't point out when they sort of take the leap to be full-time creator. It's such a risk. If you have a safety net, it's almost like not as much of a risk. But I do just want to acknowledge the fact that people act like if you're going to go into creative fields, you're never going to make money. That sort of stereotype comes from a place of truth. There's not a ton of money in the theater. But it's kind of interesting that as a woman who now makes a good amount of money, it's really weird to have people like act like you're going to be broke your whole life and then –

[00:33:08]

FT: Yes. I think if you have a very narrow view of what you can do with your theater degree, like you think the only application is to be on a stage. It's that mindset like that entraps you financially. But if you think like the world is a stage and everything involves a degree of theatrics. I was just talking to someone about how like anything you put on social media, which is now

what we spend so much of our time online in social media, like it's a performance. There's a production value, especially whatever your thought leadership is.

Again, you're not a creator first. You're maybe a scientist first, a teacher first, a coach first, a lawyer first. But you're using social media as a way to connect and potentially make more money. That requires a degree of performance and theatrics and production. So if I were to go back to your college and talk to your class in your dramatics department, your drama department, I'd be like, "Here are like the 300 different ways you can apply what you're learning in these four years," which even as a journalist at Columbia and I went 20 years before you did, that was not the rhetoric. The rhetoric was you go to journalism school. Good luck with that.

[00:34:27]

ER: Yes. It was when I was there, too.

[00:34:29]

FT: Someday, you'll get to work in New York if you're lucky. In the meantime, you're going to have work at like the Bumblebee Gazette, making eight dollars an hour, and you have to side hustle at the local diner.

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ER: Yes. That was literally the same, the same thing –

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FT: And you have to work Thanksgiving.

[00:34:44]

ER: Yes. The same thing that we were told was like everyone's here for – it's kind of like a beautiful – in some way, it's a beautiful thing because it's like everyone's here for passion.

Everyone's here for love. But the constant and it's also just like crazy because these are often times like heavily female and queer-dominated spaces. A lot of the people that I was in grad school with were women and queer men and queer people. A lot of the people that I did theater school with were women and queer people and queer men. So the fact that that's the rhetoric to those groups. I'm not saying that it's not the rhetoric at business school, but I'm pretty sure it isn't.

[00:35:19]

FT: Pretty sure.

[00:35:20]

ER: Yes. I'm pretty positive that's not the rhetoric at business school.

[00:35:24]

FT: It's also directly or inadvertently also saying to these populations, money is not your domain. You're going to pursue this career. Well, then money is not going to be part of your life. So what the – I mean, essentially, you're saying to that, but like you don't have to worry about. Not worry but you shouldn't care about it. Or it's not something that is like designed for you. It's not of your concern, although, ironically, it's all you can think about because you're not making it. It just becomes this very circuitous problem.

[00:35:56]

ER: Yes. I totally agree with you.

[00:35:58]

FT: All right, Eli, I want you to give us your best piece of advice. My audience is a little bit older. Maybe they're like striking out, or they're getting divorced. Not those of us who are happily

married or happily partnered but those of us who might be getting back in the dating world. Is there advice you have for those of us further along in life?

[00:36:18]

ER: Yes. I think I have two pieces of advice. The first one was told to me by – when I was in J school, I did this like video journalism project, and I couldn't find a subject. So my professor was like, "Use this woman. She's a witch and a psychic, and she used to be a psychic like back in the day in the seventies and eighties for like all the politicians and all the celebrities, and like she can predict the future." I was like, "Okay, sounds cool." I went to her apartment, and she was like amazing. I was there for like four hours.

At the end, she like did a palm reading for me and like a tarot card. It like wasn't looking so good. It wasn't like a super positive thing, and I wasn't kind of shitty place in my life at the time mentally. She said to me, "Be still and wait." I was like, "What? That's your advice. Are you kidding me?" I left and I was like, "Are you kidding me?" I was like, "What does that mean?" She was like, "Be still and wait. You are so obsessed with making life happen to you. What if you just let life happen? What if life just happened to you, instead of you making life happen? What if you just let life happen to you? Be still in wait."

That was right before 2021, actually. 2021 was the year that like my whole entire life changed. 2021 was the year that like my literary agents reached out to me by the end of the year. 2021 was like the year that I met my boyfriend. 2021 was like the year that I was about to get a book deal. It was early 2022. So like all of those things. It just made so much sense to me, so like that is such beautiful advice and the fact that this was like a 75-year-old woman telling me this, like telling me as though she would tell anyone that.

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FT: Can I get her number?

[00:37:54]

ER: Yes. No, seriously. Her name is Terry. I'll give you her last name. I forgot her last –

[00:37:57]

FT: Listeners, I'm putting it in the show notes.

[00:37:59]

ER: She's amazing.

[00:38:01]

FT: I love that. I love that. I think this advice of like letting life happen for you sometimes and even when you don't think it is. Sometimes, rejection is happening for you. I love when we can spin the negative into something potentially meaningful like that.

[00:38:19]

ER: Yes. So that was like one piece. Then I'd say like the second thing, and this is something that I realize every single day, but then I read other people, realizing it, who are older than me is that like nobody really feels like an adult or feels like they have everything together. People are just like cosplaying that idea or faking that idea. With that in mind, you could always just start over and try something new. You're never too late. It's never too late for a first date. It's never too late to explore your passions.

So many people and I know we always hearken back to the idea that so many successful people didn't even get their start until they were like in their 40s. Maybe that sounds so stupid for somebody who's very perceptive successful at 25 to say. But I know that if this didn't happen for me now, I would have just kept on going. I know in my heart that I would have waited until 40, 50, 60 for it to happen for me because I just wanted it so bad.

I just want people to know that they can do that, too, and it doesn't make them less than, just because they had waited a little bit longer or didn't like go on that journey earlier. Maybe that

wasn't their time. Maybe that wasn't their moment. I'm sure that I'll continue to discover that, and I'm like very open into continuing to discover that as I mature and as I have the privilege to get older as well.

[00:39:32]

FT: Wise beyond her years. Eli Rallo, thank you so much for your wisdom, for your candor. Congratulations on everything and so much more to come. I love watching you. I love learning from you. I hope everybody that follows me will start following you because you're worth it, and you have a lot of important things to say. I appreciate you.

[00:39:53]

ER: Thank you so much. I appreciate you, and I love learning from you as well. Thank you so much.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

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FT: Thank you so much to Eli for joining us. Her book is available at theelirallo.com. I'll include that link in our show notes. She's also doing a massive book tour. If you're in Philadelphia, Atlanta, Nashville, Austin, St. Louis, so many incredible cities Eli is visiting starting in January. You can learn all about her whereabouts on her website, elirallo.com. I'll see you back here on Friday for a fresh episode of Ask Farnoosh. Until then, I hope your day is So Money.

[END]