

**FT:** So Money episode 82, Mandi Woodruff.

[00:31]

**FT:** Hey everyone, welcome back to So Money. I'm your host, Farnoosh Torabi. Thanks for joining me, whether you're driving to work, coming home from work, on your jog, I so appreciate you joining me. I know that there are millions of podcasts, well, maybe not millions, are there millions? Lots of podcasts to choose from and you've chosen to spend your 30 minutes, 35 minutes-ish with me. I really appreciate it and I'm exceptionally excited to unveil today's guest. My guest today, she knows what it feels like to be in your twenties and overwhelmed by work, by money, by, well, life in general and I think that maybe a lot of listeners, you know, and if you're not in your twenties maybe you're in your fifties and you kind of feel this way still and maybe you still can relate. Well, my guest, she's only 27 years old and she's already experienced in her short adult life a devastating layoff from work just two months after joining the company, talk about wakeup call. She nearly went broke and I believe it was something like \$13 or \$14 left in her bank account at one point and really she, like many twenty something, she found herself at a loss for figuring out how to redirect her life and I think this happens a lot in your twenties. I experienced it I'll admit, I mean I recall at one point being in a movie theater one night after weeks and weeks of not sleeping much over working, not getting enough to eat, getting told at work I was not good enough and at that point really just questioning all of my life decisions, frankly, and I was sitting in a dark, crowded theater watching, I think it was Big Fish. Did anyone see that movie? I didn't, obviously didn't finish it. I couldn't tell you much about it but I remember it was Big Fish and I started to, I started to cry like a baby and it wasn't a sad movie, at least it wasn't a sad part during the movie and I just started sobbing and then hyperventilating because that what happens after you sob, you hyperventilate, it's what happens when you're having a nervous breakdown I suppose. And then, I was being escorted out of the movie theater so I guess all this to say that I've been there. Your twenties are rough and then on top of that you're expected to make smart financial decisions. What? So, today's guest is going to put things in perspective for us a little bit. Her name is Mandi Woodruff and she is a warrior. She knows the pains of trying to figure it all out before you hit thirty which is this big pressure we're all under when we're just out of college like getting all of our ducks in a row by the time we're thirty. Who told us this had to happen? Well, anyway, it's a loser's game according to Mandi and I happen to agree. By day, Mandi is the personal finance correspondent for Yahoo Finance and there she hosts the weekly web series, Money Minute, delivering 60-second explainers on some of life's trickiest money questions. She's been a reporter for more than 7 years and studies journalism at the Grady College of Journalism and Mass Communication and just FYI that is home of the Peabody Awards. Pretty neat. She lives in Queens, New York. Now, during our time with Mandi, we learned a lot, namely the moment that she decided to change her money story and stop her past from dictating and sabotaging her finances, frankly. We're going to learn how she negotiated her way to a 30% raise. Yes, I think that has to go in the Guinness Book of World records. I mean to be in your twenties and to have the [inaudible -03:35] to ask for that much more and then to get it. Awesome. Also, she discusses how young professionals can maximize their twenties to get what they want out of money, career and life and all without having a meltdown, breakdown, whatever you want to call it. Here is the lovely Mandi Woodruff.

[04:20]

**FT:** Mandi Woodruff, welcome to So Money. And avid listener, a friend and now, you're a guest. I'm so honored.

[04:30]

**MW:** Thank you so much. I'm kind of a So Money nerd. So, this is thrilling for me. Thanks for having me.

[04:35]

**FT:** Yeah, you're perfect for this audience. You are, are you thirty yet?

[04:40]

**MW:** Not quite yet. I'm 27.

[04:42]

**FT:** Not quite yet. You're 27. You're the personal finance correspondent for Yahoo Finance. You have a very active Instagram, Tumblr, Twitter, Facebook, you're on video on Yahoo, you're writing amazing pieces about, you know, everything and things that we don't even talk about, I think, that relate to people under 30 and this quest for getting it all together by the time we're 30. It's a myth. But, you explore it very well and very eloquently and I wanted to have you on the show because I think not only do you come to the show with a lot of perspective about how the world at large is dealing with money, specifically the younger Gen Y group but also you, you have a very compelling story, Mandi, and I'd love to start there if I may and talk about your journey a little bit. Now, right now, you're the personal finance correspondent at Yahoo Finance. I remember going to breakfast with you one morning and you were like "You don't wake up dreaming that this is going to be your day job." Like, you don't grow up thinking "I'd like to be a personal finance writer." So, take us back a little bit like what's been your journey to where you are today. Was it so conscious and deliberate?

[06:01]

**MW:** That's really. No, I didn't dream of being a personal finance correspondent or writer. I always knew I wanted to write though. I think that's what most writers have in common is that they grew up reading and getting lost in some books and wanting to tell stories and when I was in high school, actually I had to do a whole paper on what I wanted to be when I went to college and what I said was I wanted to run Seventeen Magazine and I, you know, didn't like all their content and I wanted to go make it better and, you know, write for women and write for real girls and that didn't end up happening. I did study magazines but when I went to college I fell in love with daily news reporting and just the immediacy of it and writing a story and having it go up and staying in a newsroom all night, you know, being like a little wordsmith and 'nerding' out with my friends about AP style and all of that and I enjoyed it so much. I live in this little bubble when I was in college kind of, you know, print journalism was like the thing. This was 2006, 2009 I think when I graduated and I thought that was what I was going to do, you know, I was going to be a newspaper reporter. Cut to graduation, 2009, I kind of knew there was a recession going on but like I said, I was in this, you know, college bubble in this campus in the University of Georgia and when I graduated, I remember being so like so optimistic. I mean I had this ear to ear grin at graduation. I was ignoring everyone kind of telling

me that there was this recession happening and that, you know, newspapers were cutting jobs and I may never get a job. I was just so ready to get out there and go to the next level. And, you know, it was May and I only had one job offer, it was from a small sort of newspaper in North Georgia and it was a steady job. It would've been a nice income and obviously I wanted to be a writer. This was like the perfect thing for me but part of me was whispering and it was saying "You're not ready for the cubicle just yet, Mandi. Like, you're not ready for the office life. You need to get out there while you have this sort of freedom and do some traveling." And so, I took 5 months of to my little brother's chagrin. My little brother, actually, was like 17 but he was like my business manager. He was in the background. He's like "You're an idiot. Why are you turning down this job offer? This is cold hard cash, you know. We're in a recession." He's 17 years old, mind you. And, I'm just like, "Alex, I've just got to follow my dreams.

[08:19]

**FT:** I have to find myself.

[08:21]

**MW:** I have to find myself.

[08:22]

**FT:** Remember when people did that? That was a thing.

[08:25]

**MW:** That was a thing, the 'eat, pray, love' situation. So, yeah, I spent 5 months traveling and I and, you know, the world did not end. I came back and I did get into the business. Sadly, the recession was still going on and my very first job, my very first real job, in New York actually, for a magazine, you know, I started, I was so excited. I was in New York City. I was going to have the whole experience, Sex in the City all that and I lost my job, like two and a half weeks after I started, two and a half months after I started, I should say.

[08:55]

**FT:** I understand that and I also understand that you bankrupted yourself in the months following. You couldn't find work. Were you regretting going on 'eat, praying and loving' for like 5 months and you came back and this happens?

[09:09]

**MW:** Well, you know, bankrupting is a very like dramatic term. You have to have a lot, you know, I don't think I had enough money to be considered like bankrupt, you know, you have to have a ton of money to like actually go bankrupt. But, what little money I had, yeah, I blew through it. I mean I moved up. When I got back from my travels, I remember it very vividly, I had \$16.24 in my bank account and I was at a Starbucks before they had free WIFI and I paid, I think \$3 to sign up to get on their WIFI and I was thinking "Oh, now I have \$13 to my name." But, at least I had one paycheck I think when I got a couple of paychecks when I was actually let go and then I had unemployment benefits and I did I blew through it. You know, I spent the whole summer, that summer looking for

more jobs, you know, a new job in New York and I gave myself two months. I gave myself, my deadline was my birthday that August and on August 5<sup>th</sup> I was down to my last. I had just paid rent for August. That was it and I got a job offer the day before my birthday on August 5<sup>th</sup> which was 'Thank you, Lord'. It saved my life.

[10:10]

**FT:** Well, there's something to be said about setting a deadline in your head but also on paper. You tend to get going to meet that deadline and you'll do whatever it takes.

[10:20]

**MW:** I think so. I mean I try not to do it too much. It can kind of stress me out and, honestly, I think when you're in your twenties people get, you know, just get like a little obsessed with, "You know, I have to hit this milestone by 22 and I've got to do this by 25 and oh, she's done that by 28. I have to have this." And, it can really stress you out. You know, I can't even, I think a big wakeup call for me was when I was, I don't know, it was a couple of years ago. One of my close friends from college who was up here, you know, toughing it out in New York City with me, you know, her and her boyfriend were kind of they were on track. They're living together, on tracks where the big M word, the big next milestone and it didn't work out and she had, you know, a meltdown. She ended up, you know, admitting herself to the hospital.

[11:04]

**FT:** Wow.

[11:05]

**MW:** And, yeah, it was serious. It wasn't even, it was more of like a, I don't want to put words and, you know, diagnose her but from my outside looking in, it seemed like it was just like a mental break, like you know, the crushing, the soul crushing effect of, you know, having this picture perfect idea of what your life is going to be at this certain age and then coming to the realization that's not what was going to happen and she just broke down. And, seeing that from the outside, it was a moment where I just said, "This is some BS, like we cannot keep lying to ourselves and setting all these crazy goals for ourselves and, you know, in the process destroying ourselves and I'm really grateful. I think you asked me earlier was did I regret, you know, traveling and having no money and I don't. It was such a great experience for me. And, to be honest, all those stories that I can say about my travels have been, has worked wonders for me in job interviews. But, also, coming back and having no money and then getting laid off and dealing with that and, you know, being unemployed and going to jobs, you know, job interviews all the time. That really taught me very early in my career that nothing is ever a hundred percent and you can't expect all of your plans to go as you would like them to and I'm really grateful for that lesson very early on because I didn't have any, you know, I didn't have all these wild fantasies about everything working out because I already knew you can't really, you know, plan.

[12:30]

**FT:** Tony Robbins was our first guest on So Money and he said something that I will never forget that I like to repeat is that ‘the quality of your life is indirect proportion to the amount of uncertainty you can comfortably deal with’.

[12:44]

**MW:** Yes. Oh my gosh.

[12:45]

**FT:** Right? That just sends chills up my arms because I, it’s so true and, you know, being certain is a human need. Like, we need to feel certain, of course, but we also need and should feel uncertain at times and I think that, yeah, if you can live with that. You can kind of swim in uncertainty and feel okay and comfortable with that, you’re going to be okay and I think that you, Mandi, having left the country in your early twenties during a recession to sort of be uncertain and take life in stride like that, I think was so brave and was probably the best investment you could have made for yourself in your twenties. Because, I agree that so often we graduate from college and we just start doing what we are expected to do and we start to create these expectations for ourselves based on what society expects of us and then, you know, some things are out of our control when those goals don’t materialize it can feel like the earth is crumbling around us and it takes someone brave to really face those fears and go outside the comfort zone. You did this on your own. Like, a lot of us do that as a reaction to something else, like we get laid off and then we’re like, “Okay, I’ll start a business.”

[14:00]

**MW:** Right.

[14:01]

**FT:** But, even braver is to actually have the job, leave and say “You know what, I’m going to do this thing on my own. Let’s talk about your best financial philosophy. You’re very ripe at the age of 27. I think you’re wiser beyond your years though, especially when it comes to money. Share with us one personal financial philosophy that helps you make healthy decisions with your money.

[14:25]

**MW:** Can I just copy what Tony said, because...

[14:28]

**FT:** Yeah, copy paste.

[14:30]

**MW:** I can’t even tell you. I think that expectations are such a, I really try to manage my expectations a lot in my life. Being really ambitious, obviously you want the world. You know, I have so many crazy ideas. I could sit all day and talk about what I want to do with my career but I really try to ground myself and just take it back to basics, you know, keep your expectations, you know, attainable and prepare for the worst. You know, I think that that’s coming from, you know, I know we’re probably going to get into some questions about my childhood a little bit later but you know

I'll say I kind of grew up in household where nothing was ever, you know, quite so stable and I was always kind of seeking that stability and I think that the simplest thing we can do in our lives to get to that place of financial stability is living within our means, having a realistic expectation of what your money can buy and then living within that little, you know, those parameters which can be, you know, when you, can be a little hard for people especially, you know, when I moved to New York City, all my friends were brunching and they were going shopping and "Oh, well, I got a new job, I got to get a whole wardrobe. You know, I got to 'Devil wears Prada', all that kind of stuff and, you know, you can fall into that and I kind of did. The first thing I did with my first paycheck, went out and bought a fancy iPhone. That's something that I probably wouldn't do today if I can go back. But, I've gotten really, really good with looking at the numbers coming in and saying, "What can I realistically do with this?" And then, also looking ahead and where can this money take me if I just put a little bit away.

[16:03]

**FT:** Can you get even more specific? I love to know like what is your analysis like, I mean is there a question you always ask yourself? Do you put experiences before things? Do you, like how do you prioritize your needs and wants?

[16:21]

**MW:** Experiences before things is a huge thing for me and, you know, I live with my boyfriend now and we are just kind of going through, we're kind of circling each other and finding out how we are, what our little like money quirks are and my thing is I love spending money on, as I will save and save and save up for a great vacation. You know, I actually have a whole little separate savings account just to go to Broadway shows because it makes me so happy to go a, you know, go see the theater and all that kind of stuff and he's more of like "I'm going to save up and buy a new camera." You know, "I'm going to save up and buy a new like set of headphones." Something like that. But, for me, what makes me happy are those experiences, especially when you can share them with someone else and I don't know how it came to that realization really but, you know, obviously I like to travel and that's what gives me the most joy and like it gives me something to talk about, you know, I think of, I like to do things that give me something to talk about. You know what I mean? Like, something to share the next time I see someone or something that makes me have something interesting to say, I guess, in a way that doesn't sound to vapid.

[17:23]

**FT:** No. Well, in the process you're remembering it and the experiences continues to live and breathe and I think that's where the, you know, there have been studies done that show that spending money on experiences that we enjoy can actually increase happiness. So, money does in some ways buy happiness.

[17:41]

**MW:** Oh yeah.

[17:42]

**FT:** Speaking of your upbringing, Mandi, you, I know you a little bit and you say that your sort of financial upbringing wasn't, you know, the best. Can you take us back to childhood and share with us one of your biggest money memories and the one I suppose that was the most influential that today as an adult you carry with you still and it influences you?

[18:10]

**MW:** Sure. But, I have to preface this by saying that both of my parents are exceptional people.

[18:15]

**FT:** We love our parents, yes.

[18:17]

**MW:** We do. I've gotten in trouble before for kind of bringing this up and not prefacing it by saying that. So, I love my mom, just putting that out there. My money memory, you know, this is funny. When I was around 10 years old, my parents divorced and it kind of shattered the whole household. You know, we were, we moved out and we moved in with my uncle. My mom and my sister and I were in one bed altogether and it was really rough. My mom was working a full-time job and she had 4 kids under the age of, I think, 14, my brother was 14, 4 kids to take care of and when they got divorced their finances were basically in shambles, you know. They filed bankruptcy and I was hearing all these big words being thrown out there but all I kind of absorbed was stress and anger and fighting around money and I remember some of the consequences of that time in our lives. Like, one situation, my mom and I were shopping at this little grocery store called Cub Foods and I was always very, I remember being very embarrassed or like afraid to ask for things because I always knew there was a scarcity of money. I would be afraid to ask for like a pack of gum or something like that and you know on this shopping trip I threw in like an ice cream, like a little pint or something like that and then I got one for my brother and all of a sudden they were 4 in the basket and my mom wasn't really paying attention. She was super busy and we got to the checkout aisle and, you know, we were ringing it all up and I could see her kind of look at things that I'd put in the cart and kind of take an intake of breath but she didn't say anything and she went to pay and her, you know, debit card was bounced. It didn't go through and I remember that feeling of being told, you know, "You don't have enough, some of this has to go." And, you know, watching my mom searching through her wallet for something else to pay with and leaving the store feeling so ashamed, like ashamed of myself for having caused her to be in that situation and that was, and you know that sort of moment happened a lot throughout my childhood just feeling like I was making things worse by wanting things and asking for things and I've sort of carried that with me a lot, you know, in life and until I sort of gotten to my, you know, got to college and grew up a little bit. And, they always, you know, of course my parents always told me, "It's not your fault, nothing to do with you." But, I think any kid who's going through that situation, you feel so powerless and part of you wants to believe that maybe by not doing something, you could've improved something or by doing something, you could have made something better. And, it wasn't until I got to college when I finally got out from underneath that cloud, you know, and I could say "Here's what I can control with my, you know, finances and here's what I can't control and I'm going to do everything I can to make sure that I'm not in a position or I don't have enough and that I can help, you know, my family if they need anything from me, because I never want them to feel like I don't have enough either.

[21:22]

**FT:** Well, what a lesson though, right, that you learned and, well, it could have maybe, it could have maybe turned, it could've become a different story for you in the end, you know, it could've been that Mandi grew up resentful or, you know, looking back at her childhood with anger or sorrow but it was like this motivated you to go out there and make your own money.

[21:46]

**MW:** Well, I'm not saying I was a great teenager but it was like...

[21:51]

**FT:** Who is though? I mean that's like a common denominator but I can relate because I think what you said about feeling powerless, I think that is something that a lot of youngsters feel. It's not their parents' fault. It's just a matter of fact, when you're young, you are powerless financially, you know, I mean you can make an allowance if your parents engage in that with you but I remember being 4, 5 years old and the reason that I wanted money was so I can make my own decisions and that's what money meant to me. At even a very young age, money meant taking control of your life. And so, it was not coincidence when I, as soon as I became, you know, of legal working age, I was babysitting, I was waitressing, I was, you know, doing whatever I could to whatever the little money that I could make to be able to buy my own presents for people and, you know, go to the store and buy something for myself that I didn't need my mother's approval. That for me was like pretty sweet. It was pretty money.

[22:47]

**MW:** Definitely. And, I like that you said story, I think that when I finally got out, you know, of high school and I went to college by myself, on my own, I was always like chomping at the bit to be independent. That was my opportunity to make a new story for myself, financially at least, and now I totally agree, the reason I kind of have been an obsession with saving, just a little bit of an obsession, I like to save, I just like knowing that I have that. You know, for me, saving, I think someone is I don't know who said this who I can credit with this but they said that saving gives you the power of having a choice the next time something happens to you, not having to, you know, make a choice that you don't want to make and that's kind of another way that I look at money, definitely, is giving you that power of choice and decision.

[23:32]

**FT:** Hey, you don't have to tell me. You're talking to the woman who went to the bank yesterday with her piggy banks. Well, they're mason jars filled with, I have like 700 quarters.

[23:41]

**MW:** Oh my gosh.

[23:42]

**FT:** I was like, “This would have come in really handy in college.” But, here I am inline, in front of, you know, behind small children going to redeem my coins at the bank. You know how much I had? I had like \$221.

[23:54]

**MW:** Go you.

[23:55]

**FT:** Caching.

[23:57]

**MW:** My dad always rolled quarters, like he always, you know those big gallon water cooler thingies that you have a [inaudible – 24:04]. My dad always had one of those around when I was a kid and, you know what, when I graduated college, he came to my graduation ceremony carrying like a bowling bag, like one of those big and it was stuffed full of all these rolled quarters.

[24:18]

**FT:** That’s gangster.

[24:19]

**MW:** I’m not even kidding. He gave me like it was close to a thousand dollars in rolled coins that he’s been saving for years and years and years. Yeah. My dad’s old school, he’s definitely like money under the mattress, doesn’t like me knowing how much cash he had around the house, totally old school my dad.

[24:36]

**FT:** Well, thank you, Mandi’s dad for teaching her that and being and it’s such a vivid image that you just described of your dad. I love it.

[24:46]

**MW:** He’s the best.

[24:47]

**FT:** Let’s talk about failure. You know, you’re only 27 and when I was in my twenties I had loads of it, of failure when it came to money. What’s one that you consider your biggest?

[24:59]

**MW:** Failure. I thought about this for awhile. There’s not like a huge, you know, I think it’s more of a sum of tiny failures that kind of caused some issues for me, failure to remember when my student loan bills came due after the grace period was up, when I was, you know, hiking in Machu Picchu in Peru and didn’t really realize that, “Oh, I’m defaulting on my student loans.” That was a small failure which has, you know, caused me some issues in terms of my credit. You know, I had to build back my

credit up a couple of years ago and luckily I was able to. And, another tiny failure was from when I first got my, you know, I got my first job in New York City, not negotiating my salary was a tiny failure and I think this is one of the myths about being in your twenties is that this is the time when you just take any job and you just relax and you just have fun. It's all about the fun and you'll figure things out when you're thirty and, you know, when you get older and I think that that line of thought can really mess people up because you're missing so many opportunities to take advantage of the time that you have. My first job from not negotiating that salary led to me getting a lower salary than I would have on my next job. And, it was about, it wasn't until my third, you know, real job in New York when I really sat down and I was like, "I have to make up for lost time because not only did I graduate during a recession which means that I probably wound up earning less than one of my peers, you know, 4 or 5 years ago, would have earned in the same position. I also had these 3 years where I haven't been negotiating to make up for. So, I kind of had a sit down in my own head, come up with a way to make up for all this lost time and I think I came up with like a figure of like 30% and I'd kind of just told myself I have got to get this much of a raise or else I'm never going to be able to catch up, so.

[26:47]

**FT:** And, you did.

[26:48]

**MW:** I did, yes.

[26:49]

**FT:** And, that was your, that transitions us now to your So Money moment. I wanted to ask you about that specifically. You brought it up. Thirty percent, that is amazing.

[26:58]

**MW:** Yeah, I'm pretty proud of that. I am, I have to say.

[27:01]

**FT:** So, how did it go? Like, I'm so curious. Did you just walk in there and be like "So, I actually would like to make 30% more." Or, how did you, did you ask for 50% more and you negotiated it back down to 30? What went on?

[27:13]

**MW:** Well, I don't know how it is for most people but, for me, I've never had that like walk into the office and wear the power suit and like demand more.

[27:20]

**FT:** Shoulder pads.

[27:21]

**MW:** Yeah, I've never like had that moment. It's always been a phone call, you know, it's always been me really, really hot and sweaty in my bedroom on the phone and then someone very authoritative like in a different state on the other side of the phone, Hiring Manager, and, you know, it started off, you don't really know you're negotiating until, I don't know, for me, I don't really know I had been doing it until I got the job offer and I was like, "Hello. I've succeeded." But, it starts off by them asking you typically, you know, around 'what do you make now' and I knew that if I went from there, I probably wouldn't get very far so I did a little inflating of my base salary which I've heard some experts say is totally fine and I would caution people who maybe are, you know, asking for a raise within your own company, obviously, they're going to know what you're making so you can't really lie. But, I just, I inflated my base salary by I added my bonus to it, I added some other stuff. I thought about how much I got paid, you know, in snacks and how much I've spent on clothing, I'm like all these sorts of things and traveling to work and I kind of added that all up and that was the base salary I told them that I was making. And then, they kind of came back and were like "Well, you know, how much would it take, how much, you know, you're looking to make here, how much of a bump would it take?" And, at this point, I kind of had to be a little overconfident in myself which I'm quite good at. I can talk myself up, give some little affirmations and I had to say, you know, "What am I worth to this company? And, not only that but I was in a position where they were coming, where they had approached me, I hadn't approached them. I knew that they, you know, wanted me, at least I knew that much so I could ask for more and I had inflated my base by about 10% so I told them I wanted, it would take about 25% to get me and they came back with 20. And so, altogether 30% raise, magic.

[29:08]

**FT:** Way to go. I love that. Just go in there, on the phone or in person and just ask and I love that you added up all of the other perks and benefits to your job because that absolutely has value.

[29:20]

**MW:** Totally.

[29:21]

**FT:** You know, maybe it's not coming in the form of a paycheck but it's something that you're getting that you're not maybe paying for, whether it's snacks or maybe they're paying for Metro car, whatever, whatever. That is value. And, also you asked for more than what you really wanted. You asked for a little bit more because you always have to, because you have to understand, the other side's going to negotiate back. They're not going to accept your first offer, right, so you got to go in and say, "You think you want 20%. Ask for 25%." Ask for 30%. And then, you can, you know, go back and forth and eventually you'll get what you initially wanted.

[29:56]

**MW:** Yes. Absolutely, and more. I got more than what I wanted. It was great. It was ideal.

[30:01]

**FT:** You need to put that in your book and, by the way, everyone, Mandi's in the process of writing a slam dunk book for Gen Y to get their finances in shape, get their act together once and for all. This story is priceless. You need to put that in the book.

[30:16]

**MW:** Thank you. I will. I'm writing it down right now.

[30:19]

**FT:** Let's talk about habits, you know, you say that you love to save. You do these affirmations. You're really good at being overconfident. What is a habit that helps you keep your financial profile in check, your savings in check and helps you make healthy decisions?

[30:38]

**MW:** I spend, you know, another consequence of growing up in a household where like money was always a topic of [inaudible – 30:46] anger and, you know, fear and all that kind of stuff, I was really afraid of numbers which I hear all the time from people, you know, I was just having, I just gave my makeup artist here a little pep talk because she's so afraid to check her credit report and I'm just like "Don't be afraid, just check it, just know your numbers." And, it wasn't until I finally got out of college and I was looking for an apartment. I needed to have a credit report, you know, to get approved for whatever rental or lease and all that kind of stuff and I checked my credit report for the first time and guess what I found? I found that someone had taken out a credit card under my name for like \$12,000, you know, this was back in like 5 years before I even checked my credit report and I, you know, I had this identity theft on my report and I had to go and get the error, you know, get it all taken off my report and get all that cleaned up and I had to beg to get this lease because they thought that I had terrible credit and I had to, you know, show them that I was disputing this and all that kind of stuff. So, from that was a very long-winded way of answering which is to say that today I am obsessed with knowing exactly what's happening at all times in my financial accounts and I've basically turned my smart phone into my personal financial planner and I have, I have my little, I'm looking at it right now, I have my little money category where I have credit card month, check my credit reports, I have mint bills where I check all my bills in one place. I have all my banks, you know, I have Amex, Chase, all that kind of stuff and I have my savings account and I just religiously, when I wake up in the morning, I check the weather and I check my money out and I make sure everything is where it should be and I look for red flags and I know what I have that day and, you know, some days it's a great day and I'm like "Oh hey, money in the bank." And, some days I'm like "Okay, I'm going to be eating, you know, peas soup for a couple of days until next pay check." But, it's nice for me, it's comforting to know where I stand.

[32:28]

**FT:** Yes, yes. Knowledge is power, I check my bank account a lot. I always say like, you know, when we're trying to lose weight or maintain our weight, we get on a scale. They say it's important to get on the scale at least. I don't know if you do this but it's important to have that check-in, that weigh in everyday to kind of say, "Well, maybe I can have that extra piece of pie or maybe I should just eat green vegetables all day. And, same with your money, you know, if you're doing really well in your bank account, you got a nice little tax refund and it's, you know, you don't have any debt then you

know what, go buy yourself a pocket book. But, if you're, you know, getting closer to the edge and you've got a lot of obligations still on your plate then, you know, you might want to save your splurges for later and I think you have to check in every single day. Why not?

[33:27]

**MW:** I know. You don't want to become too obsessed. I mean hopefully you're not having like a breakdown every time you look at it but and I'm trying to get better about getting to the place where I feel like I can treat myself, you know, like I've been doing pretty well for awhile saving. I always say I'm in this like, I'm in a self-imposed state of poverty which means that I am putting so much away in savings every paycheck and I give myself a, you know, a smallish budget to last me for 2 weeks and I'm like, you know, I'll come home and I'll be like, you know, my boyfriend, Enrique, like "I'm really broke right now. We can't go to dinner on Friday." He's like "No, you're not broke. You just say you are like a [inaudible – 34:02]."

[34:03]

**FT:** Well, it's a mindset. What is your savings rate?

[34:06]

**MW:** Oh my gosh, let me see, a 12% retirement.

[34:10]

**FT:** Wow.

[34:11]

**MW:** I put away, well, remember, oh another financial failure, oh yeah. I'm sorry. I forgot to mention. I didn't get a 401K at my first 2 jobs even though, this is going to kill me to admit this, they'd offered a match. I did not get, I did not contribute to a 401K until a few years ago so I'm like "I got to make up for lost time."

[34:28]

**FT:** Catching up, yeah.

[34:29]

**MW:** Yeah. And, of course, I missed out on all those great gains after the recession. I know it's terrible, I feel bad but, anyway, whatever I got to make up for lost time, so.

[34::38]

**FT:** And, you're young.

[34:40]

**MW:** I'm young, yeah, and then I'm saving about, Jeez Louise, I probably, it's kind of crazy I probably save half my paycheck every month, every paycheck. So, half at each paycheck, I probably save it.

[34:51]

**FT:** What, ladies and gentlemen, she lives in New York, okay. So, it can be done.

[34:57]

**MW:** It can be done but I will also, there's a caveat, I get free food at Yahoo. They treat us very well. So, honestly, I don't pay very much for food. It's kind of crazy and, you know, I'm the queen of fancery and cheap things to do on the weekend.

[35:10]

**FT:** Yes. Yes. Do you find that you kind of have to keep a profile? You can't be Mandi Woodruff, a personal finance correspondent for Yahoo and then be, you know, on the verge of bankruptcy.

[35:22]

**MW:** Right, well, and that would be a great story to write if I did get myself to bankruptcy.

[35:27]

**FT:** I'm writing that story. I'm scooping you on that story.

[35:31]

**MW:** I've written, I've definitely written. I've been really, you know, and we kind of talked about what, you know, we never really discussed why I became a personal finance reporter, how that ever happened. You know, I was at a job I didn't like so much, writing about something I didn't like so much and someone asked me, you know, "Do you want to be, I have an opening at this job as an inside reporter but you have to cover personal finance." And, I was just so curious about money, I never really had growing up anyone tell me anything about money, from explaining to me what a 401K was to like how to automate my savings, just how to invest, no one taught me anything and I always prided myself on being really smart, top of my class, great GPA, you know, straight As, all of that and I felt so cheated when I got out into the real world and I'm like what did I miss, you know, and I felt jealous because everyone seemed to know already all the answers and I felt like I was missing out on something. So, I kind of was like, yes, I'm going to take this job and I'm going to get the education that I felt like I was cheated out of growing up and I'm going to get it now and it's been so empowering for me, you know, to learn everything and prove that you don't have to already have all the tools and knowledge, you know, even you can start kind of late and get in the game and I really try to encourage other people to do the same. I don't think it's ever, ever too late.

[36:48]

**FT:** I love that story. You're right and I think coming to this world with a fresh lens, you know, with such a curious mind, you probably unearth strategies and behaviors that we just don't think about, that would really help us, can really help us be more attentive and that are money managers, personal money managers. So, keep up the good work.

[37:12]

**MW:** Well, thanks. I try.

[37:13]

**FT:** Okay, Mandi. You've been such an awesome guest. Let's wrap it up now with my So Money Fill in the Blanks. You're an avid listener so this should not be any surprise to you. So, finish this sentence. If I won the lottery tomorrow, I would \_\_\_\_\_.

[37:30]

**MW:** This is like a hundred million dollars, right?

[37:32]

**FT:** A hundred million like I try to create like a really big number because I have pretty rich people on the show sometimes, so I'm like, even if I say like if I said a million they'd be like, "Oh, you mean like how much I made last year?" So, yes, right? So, I had to make it like so big so just I mean even a hundred million for some of my guests is like their net worth, so I'm like, "Okay, fine Powerball."

[37:52]

**MW:** I'm like, "Can I just do a side bar real quick?" I make fun of my boyfriend. He's fills out those supermarket sweepstakes forms, is at like at our local grocery store and he actually won. He won a thousand dollars two weeks ago and he and I are going back and forth, "What are we going to do with all these money? We're a thousand heirs. What should we do?"

[38:07]

**FT:** Wow. What are you going to do? What's the narrowed down 3 things?

[38:13]

**MW:** We're going to use it to pay for groceries. It's going to be out grocery...

[38:17]

**FT:** Oh, that's so boring.

[38:19]

**MW:** Well, we've already planned our vacation for this spring, so.

[38:22]

**FT:** Okay.

[38:23]

**MW:** Anyway, fill in the blanks, a hundred million dollars, I would keep my job, obviously, a hundred million dollars is so gigantic a number. I would hire someone to figure out for me where to put all of that and the proper sort of investment places. I'd probably take a big chunk out and fill in all these gaps in savings goals that I have right now, like a gap for a wedding and a gap for a down payment

on the house and, oh my God, I would buy my mom a house, I guess and probably give everyone of my family a bunch of money and then tell them never talk, you know, never ask about this again. This is a onetime deal.

[38:58]

**FT:** Yeah, you got to be careful with that.

[39:00]

**MW:** And then, give a bunch, you know, charity, give it away, I don't know, make someone else's day with that money. That's a huge number though, I don't even know.

[39:08]

**FT:** Yeah, you almost want to give it, like half of it away immediately because it's like between 50, like I mean after 50, after a few millions like, okay, now, well, I shouldn't say that, I mean I think there's a lot of opportunity in having a hundred million dollars in that you can help so many people, so many more people so I think that'll be a priority.

[39:29]

**MW:** Yeah, maybe I would cure world hunger or something. I don't know. I would just go to Bill Gates and just ask him, "Can I intern for you and you can teach me what to do with this money?"

[39:36]

**FT:** Yeah, that's actually brilliant. I like that. The one thing that I spend my money on. I know you're a big saver but when you do spend, what's one thing that makes your life easier or better or both?

[39:49]

**MW:** Easier or better, well, I love spending money on Broadway shows. I don't know if it makes my life easier but that's the thing that makes me happiest. I love theater and concerts and things like that. Easier, there's a lot of things that I should spend money on to make my life easier and I'm trying to get okay with that, like I actually hired someone to come clean my sofa and I found it in an Amazon deal, so it wasn't that much money. But, it's those little things and I know you've written about this before in your books about taking the money and sort of, you know spending things that give you a better quality of life. Like, I should hire a cleaning person, honestly. Oh my God.

[40:26]

**FT:** Do it.

[40:27]

**MW:** We would have so many, so many fewer fights, my boyfriend and I if we had a cleaning person but it's just, yeah, it's just getting around that idea of paying someone to do something that you could do if you had the time, you know.

[40:39]

**FT:** Well, I have to say, I have a cleaning lady and before we had a kid, she was coming twice a month and now she comes every week. And, it was one of those things where I made a list of like, here are 5 things that would make my life easier or better. I learned from my own podcast and one of them was have a clean house at least a few times a day, a few times a week. So, she cleans the house and it stays clean for like 72 hours and then it's a mess again. So, because I have a kid and we have got guests coming over and it was like, you know, just paperwork was taxing and so it was just like 'Aaah', but she comes now every single week and it's just such a nice feeling to walk into my apartment and that smell of Windex, I don't know, just something about it.

[41:23]

**MW:** I want that feeling. What does Windex smell like, anymore? I don't know. I don't know.

[41:27]

**FT:** Chemicals. It's wonderful.

[41:30]

**MW:** I'm going to get there. I want to hire someone just to read my e-mail for me, God, I just need someone to just go through my e-mail and tell me what's important and delete everything else.

[41:37]

**FT:** E-mail's a big time waster.

[41:40]

**MW:** Totally.

[41:41]

**FT:** Anyway, one thing I wish I'd known about money growing up is \_\_\_\_\_.

[41:46]

**MW:** What is a 401K and then also, 'how to make more money'. No one ever tells you, we talked about this before. People tell you how to save it but no one really tells you like how to make more, how to negotiate, what to invest in, how to build your career, how to talk to the right people. I think that's the kind of information that I'm hungry for.

[42:07]

**FT:** And, when I donate money, I like to give to \_\_\_\_\_ because \_\_\_\_\_.

[42:13]

**MW:** I love PayPal because you can setup automatic monthly contributions to a charity. Like, I'm not one of those people who can just shell out like a thousand bucks, you know what I mean, in one sitting. So, I have couple I donate to the Wounded Warriors, am I messing that up, Wounded Warrior Foundation, which benefits veterans from War US Veterans and that's close to my heart. I have a

couple of brothers who were in the army and my stepdad was from the Air Force so I just contribute a little bit a month. I think it's like \$15 every month, that adds up.

[42:28]

**FT:** For sure.

[42:49]

**MW:** Yeah, and Domestic Violence Against Women, that's something that I contribute to as well.

[42:54]

**FT:** Wonderful. And then, finally, you know what's coming. I'm Mandi Woodruff and I'm So Money because \_\_\_\_\_.

[43:02]

**MW:** I am So Money because I believe in myself so much, so corny, anything someone tells me that I can't do I've always said, "Well, why can't I and here's how I'm going to prove you wrong." That's kind of how I go about my career. I like being the underdog a little bit and surprising people and that's why I'm So Money.

[43:25]

**FT:** Yeah.

[43:26]

**MW:** No one thought I could do, you know, personal finance. No one ten years ago would ever thought Mandi Woodruff would be a first of all on camera which I was so awkward when I was in high school, terrified of public speaking and just worked through those fears and I loved that. It's great to be challenged.

[43:41]

**FT:** And, you're only in the beginnings of what's going to be a masterpiece of work when you look back in ten years. So, thanks for doing what you do. Thanks for facing your fears. Thanks for showing us the byproduct of being self-confident. Pretty nice, I must say it's pretty good to be Mandi Woodruff. Thank you so much for joining me on So Money. I've had a blast. Was this fun for you? Was it good for you?

[44:04]

**MW:** This was a dream, a mini dream come true. Thank you so much. I'm so happy for you and this podcast is great. I love it so much.

[44:10]

**FT:** Thank you so much, Mandi. Everyone, checkout Mandi Woodruff at Yahoo Finance. Where else can we find you?

[44:15]

**MW:** You can find me at Twitter, @MandiWoodruff, Mandi with an i, I have to say that, and on Facebook. I do have a Facebook page. I'm having so much fun. It's a great place to share, Facebook at Mandi Woodruff.

[44:26]

**FT:** Wonderful. Alright, have a great one. Thanks so much, Mandi.

[44:29]

**MW:** Thank you.

[44:30]

**FT:** That is a wrap. If you'd like to learn more about the lovely Mandi, head over to Yahoo Finance. You can also follow her on Twitter, @MandiWoodruff. She's also on Facebook, the page is Mandi Money, Mandi with an i. We've got all this info at SoMoneyPodcast.com and there you can also find the transcript and comments from this episode and all previous ones. And, as always, I want to hear from you. Send your questions, just hop on to SoMoneyPodcast.com, click on Ask Farnoosh and ask away and there's a really good chance that I will respond, either this weekend or the following weekend. And, last but not least, thank you so much for all of your reviews, so, so generous. As you know, when you leave a review on iTunes, every week I select one new reviewer to receive a free 15-minute money session with me. I announce this reviewer on the Saturday episode of So Money. So, if you have yet to leave a review and you've got some thoughts on the show please share them on iTunes. It's actually a really fantastic way to support me and the show and to be heard but perhaps more cool is that you might be selected to receive a free 15-minute money session with me, where you and I hash it out on whatever topic you want and I've been having a lot of fun with these so keep them coming. Well, that's a wrap for today. Thanks so much for joining me. Our guest today has been Mandi Woodruff and see you back here tomorrow, hopefully. Thanks for joining. I hope your day is So Money.

[END]