

**EPISODE 1155**

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[INTRODUCTION]

[00:00:53]

**FT:** Welcome to So Money, everybody. Monday, February 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021, a new month. It’s my birthday month. Two weeks till my birthday, in fact. Shout out to all my Aquarius girlfriends and boyfriends out there. It is also Black History Month, and we will be showcasing a number of incredibly talented black entrepreneurs, authors, visionaries, luminaries throughout this month.

Kicking us off is Tina Wells, someone that I’ve been wanting to get on this podcast for years. She is somebody who took an idea during her teenage years, a business idea that she then took to become a 20-year long business, a media company called Buzz Marketing Group. She’s no longer doing Buzz Marketing Group. She’s pivoted in her early 40s to launching a publishing empire and a partnership with Target. Coming up, we’re going to hear all about that journey, the advice that she got along the way, and the hard decisions that she’s had to make over her career and personal life to launch this next chapter in her career.

Ahead of our conversation, just a couple of notes. One, if you haven’t listened to Friday’s episode of Ask Farnoosh, check it out. If you’re interested in what’s going on with GameStop and the drama around that, you’ve probably been looking at the headlines. Maybe you’re not so sure what’s going on. I have to be honest. When it first all erupted, I was not interested. I was like, “Oh, this is such noise. We have so many more important things to be worried about in the world.”

But the story kept going on, and it's unraveling, and it's interesting. It really is. I think it's important for all of us to at least know the basics, so I dedicated an entire episode to breaking it down and brought in an expert, Dr. Hans Boateng, who's been on the show before. He's The Investing Tutor. He's always fun and he did a very great job of simplifying this complex story for us and describing the both sides of the story. I walked away really understanding why it happened and kind of rooting for the little guy. Wall Street not so much.

Also, also if you're looking for some cool podcasts to subscribe to, I've got a few to recommend. These are our graduates from our Pays to Podcast program from last summer, who launched their shows under an intensive incubator program. In eight weeks, they got their shows up and running. I want to give a shout out to a few of them while I've got your attention. The first is Boss It Podcast, hosted by Sophia Noreen Syed. It provides tangible advice for women entrepreneurs in areas of business, health, and self-help. Boss It Podcast.

Next is Call IT In with Dar, hosted by Darla McCann. This is a podcast for women seeking more depth and meaning in their lives. Each week, the episodes provide practical actionable steps in mindset, soul set, and heart set living. If you're a busy mom who just wants an escape, a nice podcast that's going to maybe get you to laugh because if you don't laugh, you'll cry, Brooke Voris hosts Cheers to You. It's a podcast where Brooke, a wedding planner, laughs her way through being a business owner, mama of four, a devoted wife, and a self-described perfectionist. The podcast covers everything from working remotely with kids, meeting tight deadlines in between household chores, discovering the tipping point from going full-time corporate employee to full-time mom-preneur. That's Cheers to You.

There's Clued Up with Maria B: The Behind-The-Scenes Photography Podcast. If you're looking to take on photography in the new year, Clued Up gives photographers of all levels an inside view of the many facets and multiple layers that happen behind the scenes to produce quality images. Clued Up puts the photographer at the center of this process and focuses on the necessities of a quality shoot experience for both client and the photographer. Clued Up with Maria B.

All right. Without further ado, our first guest of February, Tina Wells, business strategist, advisor, author, and Founder of RLVNT Media, a multimedia content venture serving entrepreneurs, tweens, and culturists. Tina's been recognized by Fast Company's 100 most creative people in business, Essence's 40 Under 40, and more. As I mentioned, for 20 years she led Buzz Marketing Group, an agency that she started at age 16 with clients including Dell, The Oprah Winfrey Network, Apple, Johnson & Johnson, and American Eagle. She's the author of seven books, including the best-selling tween fiction series, *Mackenzie Blue*, and it's 2020 spin-off series, *The Zee Files*. Here's Tina Wells.

[INTERVIEW]

[00:05:25]

**FT:** Tina Wells, welcome to So Money, finally. All these years I've wanted to have you on the show, and now our stars have aligned.

[00:05:32]

**TW:** Yes, finally. I am so excited to be here. Thank you, Farnoosh. I'm thrilled.

[00:05:36]

**FT:** As you said before we went live that sometimes timing is important. Had we spoken two years ago, we would have had a completely different conversation than the one we're about to have because you've recently made a huge pivot in your career. Before we get to the pivot though, let's give our listeners the back story, which in and of itself is a podcast. We could have had a ton to talk about two years ago.

Now, we have more to talk about now with your recent venture with Target. But let's talk about when you are 16 years old, coming up with an idea. I like to think that it's because you had the

intuition to know that millennials were a force to be reckoned with, and you started a business in your teens that then blossomed into a full-blown company that you ran for 20 years. So tell me about that journey. Tell me about when you were 16 in the beginnings of Buzz Marketing Group.

[00:06:34]

**TW:** Yes. First of all, I was an accidental entrepreneur. Let me set the stage. I'm born in 1980, and 1995 I was like the rest of the girls in America obsessed with Clueless, obsessed with pop culture. I have read an ad in the back of Seventeen magazine. There was a newspaper for girls looking for writers called The New Girl Times, and I wrote a sample column on my Brother Word Processor. My mom faxed it in for me from work, and I got a call that they wanted to hire me as a product review editor.

I was super excited. I had no clue what that meant. What it meant was that I got to try really cool products for free, and I would send clips back to the companies I wrote about, and they'd always say the same thing. I like what you have to say. If I send you more stuff, will you keep telling me what you think? At 16, I'm like, "I have the dream gig. I have tons of companies sending me product." At this moment, it had not yet occurred to me that anyone would pay me for this.

I used the kind of "clients" for the first few years. I had clients but I would get friends together. We'd fill out surveys. Then I would send these results back, and it was really the first semester of my freshman year of college where a woman called me, I'll never forget, in my dorm room. She said, "I'm going to tell you something really important. I just paid someone \$25,000 for market research, and what you and your friends did was 10 times better. You have a business. It's called market research, and you need to go figure it out."

Of course, as luck would allow, I was taking an intro to business class with the head of the department. I went to Hood College in Frederick, Maryland. When I went, it was an all-women's college. I went to see my professor during office hours. I told her what I'd been up

to, and she said, “I want you to take an independent study with me, and we're going to make this a business.” I'm super fortunate to have that experience we did, and literally that business plan that I built in my dorm room with my professor was really the blueprint for my agency for over 20 years.

I had a lot of really cool moments along the way. My buzzSpotter network, which I was most known for, again it was a two cents blurb in CosmoGirl. In one of the launch issues, that got me 15,000 applications from teenagers all over the world who wanted to be buzzSpotters, and that launched the research network and then influencer. Then 350 brands later and 20 years later, I was the millennial whisperer. It was an absolutely amazing journey and a fun ride, but I often say the first 20 years of my career were pretty accidental. Now, I'm really, really focused on how I can live very intentionally and kind of do great work but have a really intentional focus now.

[00:09:22]

**FT:** That woman who called you in 1998 or whenever it was, we're the same age. So I'm imagining I didn't get any phone calls like that in my dorm room at Penn State. I wish I had. Have you followed up with her since or, I mean, did she become a part of your growth at that point?

[00:09:37]

**TW:** No. It was just one of those like, “Hey, you need to know this.” So many women like that. Jane Wurwand, the Founder of Dermalogica, was actually one of my first paying clients. I saw Jane a couple years ago and I said like, “I was 18. What were you doing?” She was like, “Oh, I just knew you were going to be something great, so why not?” I'm like, “That's just who Jane is, a champion for female entrepreneurs.”

Philosophy was an early client of mine, and really my first check came from Neil Cole, who's the Founder of Bongo and Candie's and Iconix Group from his head of PR who was just like, “I

like what you're doing. I'm just going to get you the money for this." I think that there were so many women like that throughout early years of my career who were just like, "I like what you're doing and I need to figure out how to help you." It's a huge part of what I try to do today and pay that forward but I was – There are numerous women. Miriam Hipsh, who is the Founder of The New Girl Times, who gave me and so many other young women our start as teenage journalists. There are so many women who were just incredible and helpful at that stage in my career.

[00:10:46]

**FT:** Well, as the millennial whisperer and you're a millennial ourselves. We're millennials technically. I mean, I guess it depends on what Wikipedia page you're reading, but I like to think that I'm on the cusp. I'm an elder millennial.

[00:11:00]

**TW:** Girl, we're millennials because we're not Gen Xers.

[00:11:04]

**FT:** Where are we?

[00:11:05]

**TW:** If you're born between 1980 and 1983, you're technically a Xennial, and so, when I think about it, I do find parts of my personality are a little Gen Xy and parts are more millennial. I don't feel, like, completely millennial.

[00:11:22]

**FT:** Me either because I think I very much still live like the cookie cutter life. I did everything my parents told me to. I have a house. I have two kids. I have a two-car garage. I live in the suburbs.

[00:11:37]

**TW:** Agreed. Check, check, check for me too.

[00:11:38]

**FT:** Check, check, check. The Xennial definitely sounds cooler than elder millennial. I feel like I have a staff and a long white beard. As someone who is so knowledgeable and has worked intimately with this cohort, this generation, what do you think about the way that the generation typically gets characterized? Understanding too that there are people like us potentially within the generation, and then there's people that are 10 years younger than us on a different spectrum. But we often hear that millennials are entitled. They don't want to work hard. They're emotional. In the context of work, they constantly need feedback. They need hand holding. How do you see it?

[00:12:23]

**TW:** Yeah. I remember once a client said that to me kind of like, "These millennials." I said, "Well, first of all, one thing you should remember is that you have raised a millennial, and so your millennial is somebody else's challenge." If you think about the participation trophies and all of these things, who raised them to be that way is the first thing I said. Then the other thing I often try to set the stage and talk about is remember back to 2008.

So imagine this generation leaving college. Everything that was kind of promised to them, the American dream, didn't exist. There were no jobs. We were in an economic crisis. I think about all the amazing things that millennials created. They really had to overcome so many things, and some of the best companies that we all enjoy came out of that time, new services, so

Uber, Airbnb. All of these businesses that have completely transformed how we work and play came out of that time period. Yes, every generation is going to be different.

Right now, I'm spending a lot of time learning about Gen Z. I write for Gen Z girls, and so I think every generation has their thing, and I do think that Gen Z reminds me more of teenagers from the '90s. But what I love about millennials is that like spirit of overcoming. They were able to really take like the worst lemons and make the best lemonade and kind of get us back on track. Yes, they want feedback. They want these different things. But the good and all of the amazing companies and ideas and things that have come because of millennials, I think that the good way outweighs any negative perception of them.

At one point, I feel like many of us in this business did a disservice because it was like as a researcher, I remember when someone was like millennials like me. I remember thinking that's so strange to me because I would say millennials or Gen Z or I talk about it as like research terms but not something that's like colloquial or common at all. It was like where did we – I don't know if it was because we wanted to know so much about millennials or because it was such a drastic change from Gen X. I just felt like it became way more conversational than it normally would have been.

Then also, I think as marketers, we were like, "If you don't know Gen X or, sorry, millennials and why you're going to lose your business." I think we also created a lot of fear that like, "If you don't hire us to tell you what to do, you're not going to know these 80 million people." I think there was a little bit of a fatigue around the idea of millennials too.

[00:15:03]

**FT:** For sure. You have moved on a little bit with your focus now on Gen Z. Going back in time a little bit, kind of alluding to what I was talking about the beginning of the episode, your pivot. About 13 years ago, you published a series of books for Gen Z. You began your publishing career I should say for Gen Z, a series of tween girl books, right?



[00:15:28]

**TW:** Yeah.

[00:15:30]

**FT:** This was in addition to. It's like your side hustle, like in addition to the business you were running, which who has the time. But you found the time, and this ended up planting an incredible seed for you perhaps even unknowingly at the time. But now looking back, it's such a great move. Tell us about this aspect of your journey. So take us back to 13 years ago, that heroic thing that you did that Publishers Weekly even wrote about that is now paying off in dividends for you.

[00:16:02]

**TW:** Yeah. Again, just like I was an accidental entrepreneur, I was an accidental middle grade fiction writer as well. My degree is in journalism, and so my dream was to be a fashion writer. That was what I wanted to do with my life, and researcher was like not it. Then I obviously fell into my career. I really loved the work that I was doing. I was running an office in New York, and this was 2007. I had my millennial kind of youth marketing agency, and the other massive agency was Alloy. Alloy got it stars media marketing, but then most people will know critical successes.

Well, first, it started with I believe Roswell and then Sisterhood of the Traveling Pants and most famously Gossip Girl. I had been hired by St. Martin's Press to do some marketing for a book that Alloy had just sold. During that process, they said, "You do something similar. You know a lot about this generation. You should write a book." To your earlier point, I was like, "Oh, I have no time to write a book. I have absolutely no time." Then kind of later on the campaign, they're like, "Really, you should do something."

The only time off at that point in my life I had was the two weeks between Christmas and New Year's, and I took some time and wrote a concept, and then I started sending it to friends who I trusted. I was like, "Do you think there's any there there?" The feedback I kept getting was, "Yeah, there definitely is." I was doing a focus group for a big CPG brand, one of the biggest in the world, and we were trying to – It was the first time we were talking about what a tween was. This word tween had just become a thing in 2007.

A mom pulled me aside during a focus group and said, "You seem to know about these things. My daughter is 10, and she's reading Gossip Girl books. What should I do?" I'm like, "Okay, the publisher is asking me to write something. I'm a marketer. This mom is talking to me about she wants her daughter to read, but is Gossip Girl the right thing." I thought, "Can I write about a girl who is like coming of age and can I make her a good girl, but will she be interesting? If she's not being mean and gossiping all the time and doing those things, can this girl be interesting?" That became the *Mackenzie Blue* series, which was a best-selling tween series.

But, yes, the deal as you alluded to that I was able to do was incredibly it was actually written as the most unique deal in children's publishing, and it was really important to me to kind of own all of my IP and own all of those assets so that I could then develop as I saw fit over the next several years.

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**FT:** How did you convince HarperCollins to own your IP if this was in some ways unprecedented? What was your negotiation like?

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**TW:** My very, very, very brilliant lawyer who was still my brilliant entertainment attorney, **André Des Rochers**. **André**, we talked about – I think first I have to be honest and say I was a business owner who was the expert in this space coming to do this deal. So there was definitely some cachet to that. But I think **André** and his brilliance and how he started to think

about, he was thinking about what I might want to do with this property in 10 to 15 years in a way I totally wasn't. My business was like an 18-month cycle at that point. How do we do those kind of things. I would never thought that I'd be 40 years old and doing a spin-off to that series.

His brilliance and really thinking through what my long-term plan might look like is why I'm able to do what I'm doing with the brand today, but it took a long time. That's one thing I'll say. For anyone who's looking at a pub deal, I don't know if you've experienced this yourself. It's like a very slow process. It's not anything that moves really quickly, and you can imagine this process was a lot slower because of what we were asking for.

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**FT:** Wow. Do you think they're kicking themselves now? Who cares?

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**TW:** I'm just going to leave that at a no comment.

[00:20:14]

**FT:** No comment. Brilliant, brilliant, brilliant. Who taught you that you had to keep your IP? You've gotten some incredible business advice over the years. You're kind of blessed in that way.

[00:20:25]

**TW:** Yeah. I think what I've always – I know that like when I go into the room, especially at that stage in my life, it was because I knew this one thing better than anyone. I was really focused on I'm not the boomer expert. I'm not. I know this thing better, and I've spent all my time and invested all those hours in knowing this thing. If I did that and if people called me for that, then

I had to trust that I was working with the very best people and entrusting that they were that person.

If you weren't, I definitely – *Good to Great* is like the book I live by. Don't be ruthless but be rigorous. If you're not the right person on the bus, you're definitely not going to be on the bus. But if you are, I'm going to trust you and trust that the advice you're giving me is what I should do.

[00:21:13]

**FT:** You grew up partially in Lancaster, Pennsylvania, which is where my husband is from. Then your family moved to New Jersey. Talk to me about your childhood a little bit. How did you learn about money? I know you had that sort of entrepreneurial drive and maybe you wouldn't call it that then but you did at a young age. Just curious what your environment was in terms of teaching you about money and work.

[00:21:37]

**TW:** Yeah. It's interesting. You ever do those exercises. I don't know if this was a book or a course or something I was doing. It's like go back and remember your first vision of money. You know what came to me, and I'll never forget it. I remember being like three years old. Once a week, I think my mom reminded me it was Mondays. Our farmer would come to the house and say, "This is what I have for the week. This is fresh stuff." I just had the sense from a very young age that like abundance was everywhere. I was very lucky and I lived in this beautiful place and we had what we needed. So I just grew up.

I'm the oldest of six. When I was about six I think, we moved from Lancaster to New Jersey where my mom's family is based. My father's an only child. My mother is 1 of 14, and so I have over a hundred cousins on my mom's side. I grew up in just this, and my mom's also the 12th out of 14. Imagine having so many older cousins. I grew up feeling very protected, very loved. I'm definitely the oldest of six so not – my parents invested in our education. I loved fashion

and pop culture. I was not going to get every newest thing, so the company was also an amazing gig to get me the things I wanted.

But I didn't really grow up feeling a sense of lack. I felt that I had to work hard that I could create. But I also think because I started so young, a lot of things now that at 40, being completely honest, I could never take the risk to do in my mind weren't really risks at that time. It's like, "It's fine." I mean, I'm running a business from my dorm room, and then I moved home after college. I always felt like, "Okay, I have a little bit of a safe place to land if this doesn't work out." I've been more on the risk side in my career because I'm like, "Well, then I'll just have to figure out a way to make more."

[00:23:38]

**FT:** Yeah. There seems to have always been that support system, which we maybe we take for granted when we're young, but it is for all a lot of us like the thing that keeps us okay with taking on risks and pushing ourselves a little bit harder and harder.

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**TW:** It's so true.

[00:23:57]

**FT:** Tell us about your tween line, *The Zee Files*, with Target. What's it like working with Target?

[00:24:04]

**TW:** Honestly, they are a dream partner. I didn't know what to expect, and this is only a year ago. I had the first meeting to say this is my vision. So when I decided to leave my agency, what I realized was like I had done all the things I wanted to do, even being so fortunate to produce the SuperSoul 100 for Oprah Winfrey Network. I'm like, "I've kind of done everything I

want to do in the agency world.” What was really important for me and is important for me right now is representation in media and in content. I thought I was a girl who read a book a day over the summer. I just loved to read for fun, and there's such a lack of diversity in middle grade fiction. Less than 10% of protagonists are girls of color, black girls. I thought what can I do from a content perspective.

First of all, it's a creative outlet and I love it. But if we were going to reimagine *Mackenzie Blue*, what would I do to make her a little bit different or be a little bit more explicit about her? I was able to do that, and Target really gave me the ability to create and carve out this unique world and unique space. It's funny. It's like how involved were they. Really like the cover. Literally, I feel like the only comment I've gotten was like, “We need to make sure the cover is going to pop off of the shelves.” Along the way, I'm like, “Do you want to read a couple chapters? Do you want to see what we're working on?” They've just been completely supportive. They worked with me to find a really creative solution to get these four books out um.

I'm lucky to be working with Ingram and their traditional publishing imprint called West Margin Press to put these four books out. So there are four books in *The Zee Files* series. Then I also sold another series to Penguin Random House that's going to debut next fall called *Honest June*, and it's about a girl who can't tell a lie. It's an all-black cast which is incredibly rare in middle grade fiction and beyond rare for not being historical fiction. I've just been really fortunate to spend this year creating these really amazing characters.

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**FT:** The world that these characters live in, you can create too. There's a world outside of books potentially too, right?

[00:26:27]

**TW:** Yeah, definitely. That's where you have to be patient and build the audience and build – But I have so many things that I am looking forward to bringing this audience. I love tween

girls. I love that moment. I think if we think back to our lives being tween girls. I don't know about you but I was like reading *Baby-Sitter's Clubs* and everything I could get my hands, *Sweet Valley Twins*, *Sweet Valley High*. Those ideas of those girls were so important to who I thought I could become. Beyond the books, I think the opportunity to create merchandise and create lines and brands that speak to girls is what's really exciting for me.

[00:27:06]

**FT:** What happened to your company? Did you sell it? Did you divest? What happened and how – That must have been a really hard decision in some ways.

[00:27:14]

**TW:** It was. I spent 2019 grieving it. I knew in the beginning I came to terms with like my heart is not in this anymore, and it really was a year process of grieving. But when I started to do the math and I thought, “Okay, I can double down. I can grow this agency to hundreds of people and then what. I’m going to sell it to whom.” I remember looking at a few of the holding companies, the big companies that potentially buy-up agencies, and they were starting to lose some of their value. I’m like, “Okay. If my end solution is I’m going to sell this company.” But they just posted it at a 10% loss, here I’m like, “That maybe isn't the right exit strategy.” Then if that is the exit strategy, that means I’ve got to go there for five years. Do I want to do this for five more years?

I at the time was doing my Henry Crown Fellowship at The Aspen Institute, and they tell you going in this is for people at inflection points, and your life might change a lot. I was like, “No, my life's not going to change. I’ve got my gig.” It’s hilarious. My life is completely different, following that experience. But I just realized that I wanted something different. First, I took a sabbatical. Then I – One of my first trips was to Yellowstone. I just remember like sitting in Yellowstone. We were spending time tracking, looking at like bison and tracking a grizzly bear or something. I thought I don't want to go back to my agency and I just knew. I was like,

“That's done.” Then I thought, “Okay. So what do I do with the amazing people I've worked with?”

I had launched a platform for women of color called Elevation Tribe about a year prior, and the focus of that platform is to help women of color launch, grow, and lead companies. I thought, “Okay. Well, my team can definitely work on that, and maybe we work on my brands.” I just sold *Mackenzie Blue* to Audible, and I thought, “Okay. There's a new opportunity here for me with content, and maybe that's what I need to do.”

Earlier this summer, I launched RLVNT Media. It's focused on creating content for entrepreneurs, content for tweens. Then the third category I call culturists which will allow me to do some of the influencer stuff I've been doing. But I decided like content is what I really love. Content is where I feel like I can make a bigger difference. I think that there are other people in the agency game who are just so passionate about it and are doing amazing work. Then I just kind of stripped some of the assets like our influencer network of 40,000 people and moved it over to RLVNT Media.

[00:29:48]

**FT:** And all in a pandemic. Not all in a pandemic but you were very busy in these weird months and what will probably be another year of weirdness.

[00:29:59]

**TW:** Yeah. Well, it was but I was saying to a friend. They're like, “Wow, your 2020 has been amazing.” I said, “Yeah. My 2019 really sucked like really, really, really bad.” I'm like, “I was grieving this business. I was doing this very privately. I was going through all this.” Then by the time we got to spring and realized we'd have this amazing opportunity if we could get this book written in eight weeks to debut for this holiday season, I had been through all the bad stuff and started the setup. I was lucky but 2019 did not feel lucky, so I didn't feel great at all.



[00:30:33]

**FT:** Who do you turn to for advice? Who do you turn to when you're trying to decide between the – In this case, when you're at this kind of a crossroads, who do you call?

[00:30:48]

**TW:** A lot of times, I talk about the fact that when you've got these really tough decisions to make. I often talk to less than five people because a lot of times people will start to give you advice based on their life experience. So it's not often I talk to people in my industry. I have some friends who have been dear friends of mine for 20 plus years, people who know me the best. I talked to a few of them. There were a few of them who were in the loop about what was going on.

My best friend, Missy, we've been best friends since we were 10 and 11 years old. I remember it was like I always thought that I was like the strong friend, the responsible friend, and Missy was the friend that like always made sure we had fun. I remember we went to eat one day, and this was like when I knew I was closing, and I just sat down, and I just started crying, which is not my thing at all. She's like, "Oh, my gosh. What is happening? What is happening? Talk to me." I remember she said something to me and she said, "Tina, you know, sometimes it's okay to just stay down. You don't have to get up for anybody right now and you don't owe any of us any explanation about why you don't want to do this anymore."

It was just like so freeing to get that advice. If you need to stay down for a minute, stay down. You don't have to justify this to anyone. It was really – Next then we think, "Well, I have to have a story of why am I doing this." It wasn't a business friend. It wasn't a coach. It was like the person who knew me the best and just loved me as her friend who gave me the best advice at that stage.

[00:32:24]

**FT:** Wow. That's a good friend and that's such a good reminder that a lot of us can probably relate to feeling like we have to explain ourselves all the time. Sometimes, you just don't want to do things, and that's it, period, next.

[00:32:43]

**TW:** Sometimes, there's the guilt of thinking that you've been so lucky to do things and shouldn't you keep going. For me, it was like, "Okay, I just don't want to do this thing anymore." The people closest to me are really giving me permission to do that. Then I went through like an unloading spree last fall. I had been working at Wharton, running a program as the Academic Director of a program called Leadership in the Business World. For five years, I just loved those summers with my students. I taught over a thousand students, but then I realized last fall it was the moment for me to kind of step away from that.

There were a lot of things where I was like, "Okay, some board work. I've got to step away from that." Now, looking a year later, I'm like, "Had I not done that, I wouldn't have had time to write three books in a year, commit to seven." There would have been no space for that.

[00:33:34]

**FT:** I'm reading this article that profiled you on phillymag.com, which by the way my best friend is now the new editor in chief of Philly Mag, Kate Dailey. Everybody, subscribe to Philly Mag.

[00:33:44]

**TW:** Yes! Wow!

[00:33:45]

**FT:** So exciting. I'm trying to pick this apart and see what I want to expand upon in this podcast with you. You gave so many interesting answers to these questions. I'm going to

highlight this. You have your eye on now. This wasn't 2018, but you said you have your eye on Yara Shahidi, and I'm obsessed with her as well because I'm Iranian. She's Persian and Iranian as well, and I somehow tagged her on Instagram, and she responded to me. I was like, "Whoa." I just screamed. I screamed a little bit in my house. My kids had no idea what was going on with their mom, but I'm obsessed with her. What do you think? She's kind of the full package right now.

[00:34:28]

**TW:** She's beyond. I was really lucky to go to a SuperSoul conversation when she was in conversation with Oprah, and Oprah was even just like speechless with her.

[00:34:39]

**FT:** She's so brilliant. In this same article, you also talk about how you want to still hone on this idea of harmony, balance in your life. This was in 2018, right before your worst year ever. Do you feel like you have gotten warmer to that or closer to that idea of balance in your life?

[00:35:02]

**TW:** Yeah. I definitely have started achieving that. I will say like had I not, again, cleared all that space, I wouldn't have had space to meet my partner this year. I moved to Brazil to be with him. There's like so many things that happened, and I often tell Chris. I'm like, "I just wouldn't have had space or time for that." For me, be in this place and do the things that I love and have been able to kind of go there in the middle of a pandemic and still be able to work.

I would joke with my friends. They're like, "Oh, you're living on an island in Brazil." I'm like, "I am working more than when I was back in the US." I think that idea of work-life harmony is even more. It's something that I am getting to live right now, but I think the biggest challenge for all of us becomes how do we protect our work-life harmony. That I think, it becomes what

opportunity do you say yes to. What do you make space for because anything can kind of throw that off balance? I think now the challenge is just what's the right thing, what's additive.

[00:36:12]

**FT:** Well, it will be so exciting to continue following you, Tina Wells. Thanks so much for coming on the show and sharing this journey. Really, again, I know that it would have been awesome to speak two years ago, but I feel like what you have learned and what you have achieved in the last two years made this conversation all the richer. Thank you.

[00:36:32]

**TW:** Thank you so much, Farnoosh. It's been great.

[END OF INTERVIEW]

[00:36:37]

**FT:** To learn more about Tina, check out [tinawells.com](http://tinawells.com). Of course, if you're in Target like I am weekly, check out *Zee Files* and *Mackenzie Blue*, her books, and soon probably merchandise. Thanks so much for tuning in, everybody. I hope your day is So Money.

[END]