

**EPISODE 1571**

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[0:01:08]

**FT:** Welcome to So Money, everybody. I'm Farnoosh Torabi. Is there a cultural moment from your past that might look different in retrospect? Maybe it's a scandalous tabloid story that seared into your teenage brain or a political punchline that just feels wrong now.

My guest today is Emmy-winning journalist, Susie Banikarim, is the co-host of a new podcast called In Retrospect. Where she and New York Times' editor, Jessica Bennett, revisit a pop culture moment from the 80s and 90s that shaped them to try to figure out what it's taught us about the world and a woman's place in it.

Susie and I go back in time. We talk about some of the throwbacks from Luke and Laura's infamous wedding on General Hospital, to the Monica Lewinsky and Bill Clinton's Scandal. And even that awkward interview between Barbara Walters, and Mike Tyson and Robin Givens.

How did television shape the public discourse and our analysis of gender, women, money? This is definitely a podcast that I will be subscribing to. Here's Susie Banikarim.

[INTERVIEW]

[0:02:22]

**FT:** Susie Banikarim, welcome to So Money. I can't believe that this is the first time I have my good friend and Emmy award-winning journalist on So Money. Shame on me.

[0:02:31]

**SB:** Oh, my God. I'm so happy to be here.

[0:02:33]

**FT:** And you're here. Let's just announce Dolly Parton. Because she will be making appearances throughout this interview.

[0:02:41]

**SB:** Hopefully not. She actually is sort of used to my being on my computer in certain ways. Usually, she can keep it together. But sometimes there's a noise outside. We should explain that not actual Dolly Parton is in my apartment. My dog is named Dolly Parton. We just call her Dolly, unless she's being bad. You may hear an occasional bark from her. But she's usually able to keep it together. We're hoping for the best.

[0:03:07]

**FT:** Whatever she's feeling, I feel like we can work that in into the episode. Whatever noise she makes, we'll make it part of the show. But, Susie, just a little background for our listeners before we get into the exciting project that you have going on currently that we want to really talk about, which is, in retrospect, a podcast that you are hosting with New York Times' editor Jessica Bennett. But Susie and I, everybody, go way back to the year 20 – oh, gosh. 2021? Sorry. 2001. 2001.

[0:03:38]

**SB:** I think it was – yeah.

[0:03:40]

**FT:** 2002?

[0:03:41]

**SB:** Graduated in '02? Or did we graduate in '03?

[0:03:44]

**FT:** We graduated in '03. Here's the story. Susie and I went to Columbia Graduate School of Journalism together. We were paired in many similar projects. We were in the same group, in the same classroom. Our teacher confused us once in a while. Susie and I are both Iranian. I look at Susie's papers back, like, A+. And I would go, "Yay." And then come to realize like, actually, that was Susie's paper. And my paper got like the B-.

[0:04:12]

**SB:** That is, I don't think, an accurate memory of what happened.

[0:04:15]

**FT:** It is. I was not a good grader. Ari Goldman, who was our professor, was the seldom professor in the entire department that graded papers. You weren't supposed to – it was a pass-fail. Okay. We were paying too much money for us –

[0:04:29]

**SB:** I didn't even know that. That's so funny. I mean, I feel like though you did something really smart when we were at grad school, which is you focused on using the time to get professional clips. You were the biggest hustler I knew in grad school. You were like working and getting stuff published. And I was just like, "La-la-la." Like, I'm just here having a good time. And then when I graduated, I was like scrambling to get a job.

[0:04:57]

**FT:** Well, you did okay. Things worked out for you, Susie. I want to mention that – I mentioned already that you're an Emmy award-winning journalist and filmmaker. You've run newsrooms everywhere. Vice, Gizmodo, The Daily Beast. You directed the 2020 documentary *Enemies of the People: Trump and the Political Press*.

You started your career not long after journalism school. You went over to, I believe, ABC News. You were a producer for Diane Sawyer, George Stephanopoulos. You helped launch Katie Couric's talk show, which you were very instrumental in helping me get on the Katie Couric talk show back then.

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**SB:** This is why it really helps to have a terrible memory. I don't even remember that. I just thought you got on your own.

[0:05:40]

**FT:** No. Well, I did meet with Jeff Zucker. And it was a very intimidating one-on-one. But I had you and others there who were championing me and it was all good. You need all the stars to align in order to like get on a talk show.

And you were born in Iran. You spent your teen years in California. Relevant, because we're going to talk about pop culture from the 80s and 90s. You read Sassy. You watched soap operas. You listen to The Beach Boys on your Walkman.

[0:06:07]

**SB:** Yeah, that's right. I'm definitely a California girl in all the ways that you can be when you're an Iranian immigrant. But I did my best. I used to drench my skin in baby oil and suntan and like, in my hair. And I really tried. I really tried.

[0:06:28]

**FT:** Oh, well. I'm really excited about this podcast that you're hosting, you're co-hosting with Jessica Bennett, who is an editor for the New York Times. I listened to the first episode, which is about the infamous wedding, the Luke and Laura wedding on General Hospital in 1981, which spanned two days. More viewers than actual royal weddings at the time.

And your goal with this podcast and in that episode in particular is to not just go back for the sake of memories, but to really sort of understand the influence that that moment had on culture and our understanding of really important things like in that particular episode, two episodes.

Well, it was really this journey of this relationship that started with an assault, a sexual assault, a rape that ended in a marriage. And so, how that got kind of played out and then ultimately how it sunk into culture – important to realize.

I mean, I wonder if in 10 years from now, what are we going to look back on as sort of these icky or like irksome moments in culture? Wouldn't be probably from television, but probably social media. But first, tell us about in retrospect and what made you excited to do this? Because as I just read your bio, you've done many exciting things. This. Now your next venture. What drew you to it?

[0:07:51]

**SB:** I think a couple things. The podcast itself is really focused on helping us understand, especially as women and girls, what the messages we take in are sort of saying to us about how we're supposed to navigate the world. The podcast came to be because Jess and I have been friends forever. We met when we were both in Newsweek, Daily Beast. And we often would find ourselves having these conversations late at night. We're both not good sleepers. We would text or call late at night and we would sort of talk about these various stories.

And one thing that um we sort of realized was that there's this industry now. It almost feels like a cottage industry of re-examining certain women in culture. Like, Britney Spears, or Whitney Houston, or Janet Jackson. These sort of women? And what happened to them? And how they were treated by society?

And, by the way, we love that stuff. And Jess is really the person who started that industry to some degree. She did the first big interview in the Times with Monica Lewinsky that reintroduced Monica Lewinsky to the culture. But we were wondering if there was something worth examining in what it did to us to watch that.

Because, to some degree, it's unknowable what it did to Brittany, unless Britney tells you. But certainly, we know, you and I can talk about what it was like as a girl or a young woman to watch Britney struggle and to have the response to that be kind of this gleeful amusement and this sort of like dismissiveness of her as like a person who was struggling with mental health issues, who was a mother, who was like probably dealing with some postpartum. That's really what we wanted to look at, is how these moments shape us and probably shaped the listeners.

And then I think the other thing we're trying to do is for people who didn't sort of live through the 80s and 90s, like my niece, who's much younger. For them, we want to just tell them about what our cultural moments were because I think it's interesting. People don't realize how powerful soap operas are or were at that time, right?

Or they're just these little cultural moments that we kind of lose sight of because the culture moves on. But I think it's interesting to kind of reflect back and say like, "Look, this was a hugely important part of how pop culture developed." You can draw a straight line from soap operas to Bravo and reality shows. Andy Cohen has said that.

Understanding the past sort of just helps you process what you're seeing in the present. And, yes, I'm sure there will be things we will look back on in this way. And that's good. I mean, I think the culture evolves. That's actually what we're trying to highlight.

[0:10:38]

**FT:** Right. It's evidence of growth potentially and evolving. And, gosh, I remember watching, for example, the Monica Lewinsky trials. Well, really, it was her trial. But it was really the Bill Clinton trial.

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**SB:** Yes. But it really was – she who was on trial.

[0:10:57]

**FT:** Yeah. It was very biased. And I was a teenager. And, of course, at the time – gosh. I mean, I would probably have called myself a feminist back then. But, certainly, wasn't taking on that feminist protection of Monica Lewinsky during – I was just buying into the media, and the slut-shaming and all of that. Like, "How could she do that? Wow. Where are her principles?"

Meanwhile, the president of the United States – I mean, certainly, didn't think he was like this hero either. But it's interesting. At what point do you think the tides turned and like people started to say, "No. That's wrong?" Because if that was to play out today the way they did back then in the media, we would not take it. What happened culturally?

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**SB:** I mean, it's an interesting question. I think the thing about the way I received the Monica Lewinsky story too, because I was I think in college when that happened, is Monica, being 21, didn't register for me. Because I was around that age. I felt like that was an adult. Like you know how grown up you feel when you're in your early 20s or your late teens? But you're not a grown-up. That's just the reality.

[0:12:03]

**FT:** No.

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**SB:** But you feel like you are. I think part of what's interesting for me in looking back about how I process that is it never occurred to me. Like, she was just a baby. You know what I mean? She was like 21-years-old. And here she was the center of this national spotlight. She was

completely betrayed by her friend who like recorded her phone calls unknowingly. None of that stuff registered for me.

And I think it's interesting – I don't know exactly how the tides turned. I do think Monica was sort of the first inflection point. I think Monica came out with her own story in a Vanity Fair article. And then Jess did this big piece on her in the Times. And I think she was kind of the first person who was like, "You know what? I could just slink away and never sort of show my face again. But I'm actually a person. And I went through something and I think that deserves another look."

And I think that she kind of led the way on that for a lot of people. And she's remarkable actually, right? That's what's interesting about a lot of the women we talk about on this podcast. We do an episode about this very famous interview, Robin Givens and Mike Tyson gave to Barbara Walters. Do you remember this?

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**FT:** I do remember. I don't remember the details. But I remember it. I remember them sitting down with her.

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**SB:** Yeah. And so, the thing that you don't remember, which is what's wild about the way our memory works, is that the reason that interview was so famous is she admitted – Robin Givens admitted to Barbara Walters, with Mike Tyson sitting next to her, that he was physically abusing her. That he was hitting her, essentially.

And the response, the cultural response to that was to call her the most hated woman in America. That's what she became in the subsequent months. Because it was seen as her humiliating him. How dare she humiliate this man by sitting next to him and accusing him of this thing?

Meanwhile, he wasn't denying it. And there was lots of evidence that he was doing it. But she was also just like I think 22 when that interview aired. And I think about what would have

happened to me if, at 22, the whole world turned on me and talked about how much they hated me or what a gold digger. Or in Monica's case, what a slut. And they talked about her weight. I don't know that I would have recovered like these women did.

I also really have grown admiration for them. Because now, looking back, I realized these were just kids trying to navigate the world and you're a mess at that age. I don't want the things I did at 21 to follow me forever, you know?

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**FT:** And it's funny. You said you were 21 when Monica was 21. And I was like maybe a teenager. And so, I really thought being in your 20s was adulthood. I mean, I thought she should have had all her senses. She should have had all her wherewithal. She was in control of her – she should have agency. blah-blah-blah. No. Okay?

[0:15:06]

**SB:** Also, imagine, it's like literally the president of the free world.

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**FT:** Right. Exactly.

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**SB:** You know what I mean?

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**FT:** Exactly.

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**SB:** How would you not be seduced by that a little bit?

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**FT:** The power balance is a little tilted in that case. A little bit.

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**SB:** And also, I don't know if you've met Bill Clinton, but he is extremely Charming. It's like –

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**FT:** I hear. I hear that.

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**SB:** Literally having the sun turned on on you. And so, you're like this girl. And this man, he was literally one of the most like powerful, famous people in the world is paying attention to. I think it would be very easy to be seduced by that.

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**FT:** The themes that you chose, you and Jessica chose to cover throughout this first season, if you will – or I don't know. Are you doing this every Friday until forever? Or is this like you're going to do –

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**SB:** No. This is season one. Each season has 20 episodes. We launched on the 21st. We will be dropping episodes every Friday until the end of the year with some exceptions for the holidays. And then season two will start in February, I believe. And that'll be another 20 episodes. And then we'll see how – yeah, it's a lot of it.

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**FT:** So good. I love the themes that you've already chosen to explore. I want to get into the Luke and Laura episode in a minute. And that one really focusing on the interpretation of what is love? What is rape? And how that all just even played out.

And then you go into Pamela Anderson and sort of sexuality. And how that was defined in the 90s. You'd mentioned Robin Givens and abuse. That's such an important topic. I mean, television was such an informant. And I don't know if people were being as responsible as they could have been.

Who are the people behind the scenes bringing these issues to the forefront? Largely, men. These women-oriented, these female-sensitive issues, who were the people that were kind of puppeteers of this behind the scenes?

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**SB:** Well, that's interesting. I think that, in fact, in a lot of cases, a lot of these stories were actually led by women. For example, with soap operas, soap operas were made for women by women. And that's partially because women had trouble getting jobs in prime time, which was considered more prestigious.

Soap operas were seen as this kind of like silly thing. And so, it's where a lot of female directors, and writers and producers got their first breaks. And so, they were in fact the reason that a lot of these topics got covered. Rape, alcoholism, domestic violence. They had the first story lines about children coming out as gay.

They did actually move the needle in terms of making society actually a bit more progressive. But it doesn't mean that there weren't hiccups along the way. And the Luke and Laura rape or sexual assault is really a good example of that.

In fact, that storyline was explicit, right? It wasn't um a gray area. It wasn't meant to be like a date rape. And those ideas were just becoming sort of widely talked about. What happens is

they have the storyline. He comes in. He's supposed to be a short-term character. He assaults her. And then he's supposed to die.

But because soap operas air every day, they used to do overnight ratings. I don't know if they still do this. But they could tell minute-to-minute when viewers were responding to something. And they saw that when Luke was on camera, viewers responded.

That's why they slowly morphed this assault into a seduction. Because they're really just doing it for ratings. I mean, in the end, a lot of this is just about the money, right? Barbara's made a lot of money back then. And so, when they see something as popular, they chase it. And then within a couple years, it's the number one rated soap opera on television. And Luke and Laura have become kind of the center of that.

And so, I think one thing we're trying to think about is like I don't know that if you're the executive producer of General Hospital back then, or your Barbara Walters doing this interview with Mike Tyson, or you're the executive producer of a news show covering Monica Lewinsky, which actually wouldn't have been a woman at that time. Because they were all run by men at that time. But if you are, I don't know that you would have done it differently. Because you are also steeped in the same cultural moment. You don't necessarily have the hindsight that we have now.

And so, I try always to approach these episodes with like empathy for everyone involved, unless it's like an abuser like Mike Tyson. Although, I have deeply researched his story. And I think terrible things happened to Mike Tyson. But I also think Mike Tyson is an abuser, right?

But what I'm really trying to get at is we don't want these episodes to feel scolding. Look back on this and be like, "This was gross. And we're never going to watch these things again or think about these things again." We love pop culture, Jess and I. This is sort of a ways to me, right? As I'm sure you can relate to this as like a young Iranian girl, pop culture is really how I learned to be American.

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**FT:** So much. Yes. What I love about this podcast in retrospect is that it is the topics that you choose to talk about, the whole theme of the podcast, is built for a podcast. There are a lot of podcasts out there that are just trying to like give advice or have banter that's funny. And that's great. And there's something for everybody.

But for me, I feel like if you're going to start a podcast today, please have it be something that requires reflection. And you can bring in a lot of voices and you can talk about it. And in the end, it's not about having a conclusion. It's about just that you walk away going, "Wow. I really thought differently about this today than I did 20 years ago." Or it's interesting or it just sort of stays with you. And it sparks more conversation in real life. My hats to you and Jessica for this.

And I'm wondering. I don't see it here in the episodes, but like the themes of money, and how we look at women in our culture, and how we associate financial success with women in our culture and how the media has played a hand in that perception. I'm just curious if that's something that you would go into or have already maybe touched upon as you've recorded the first season.

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**SB:** We do touch on that a little bit actually. There's this really famous Newsweek article that was published that had a cover that said, "You were more likely as a woman to get killed by a terrorist than you were to get married after 40," which is an insane article. That was never true. You were never more likely to –

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**FT:** Wait. Newsweek? Newsweek. This is not TRL or whatever, do whatever they – TMZ.

[0:22:05]

**SB:** When we were kids, Newsweek was like a very serious division. It had a lot of cultural clout. They published this article. This article just strikes fear in women all across the country. It

becomes something that's often repeated so much so that Nora Ephron debugs it in two different movies that she makes.

But the fact is that it really did strike a chord. And I think it did have to do with women and women entering the workforce and gaining economic power. Because it was sort of intended in some ways to put women in their place, right? Like, "Okay, you can prioritize your career." It was kind of a reaction to the 80s, like white sneaker, nude pantyhose, corner office archetype of a career woman. And this was sort of to say like, "Listen, if you choose your career, you're going to die alone." And I think that that was in large part a response to women gaining financial power.

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**FT:** Yeah. You brought up Andy Cohen, and he's now, I suppose, the patriarch of like the new soap operas. All these Real Housewife franchises. Are you going to talk about that? I mean, that's not in retrospect. But they have been around for some time. I'm wondering even if, within that body of media work, there's been growth, or changes, or different ways that these women are being portrayed. It used to be like they were actual housewives. And now a lot of them are just entrepreneurs, independently wealthy. And it doesn't even matter like where you got your wealth.

It's just like Jenna Lyons, for example. I mean, she's like sort of like the modern Real Housewife, but not maybe the same person who would have been cast 15 years ago.

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**SB:** Definitely not. I mean, to begin with, she's a lesbian. I think that that's evolution, right? It's not right sort of heteronormative view of what it means to be a housewife. Yeah, I think there has been real evolution in the housewife universe.

I think you know that I am a huge Bravo fan. I am obsessed. I have a pretty good sense of how much it's changed. And I think the series has really evolved. They've made strides in terms of

the way they present women. But also, how they talk about race. How they talk about sort of difficult things in culture. They've definitely made progress.

And I think what's interesting when you watch more recent episodes is there's also a little bit of tackling of mental health, which, in the early episodes I think they probably were like, "The crazier, the better." You know what I mean? It's like I worked on a reality show. When you're casting, you want people to be just on this side of mentally-ill. I think that's probably really evolved.

But I actually think, and I'm sure a lot of people would argue with me about this, that the Real Housewives is essentially a woman's workplace reality show. Because, basically, they're all there working. And so, they're each other's work colleagues. And they are all jockeying for position. And they are all trying to make money from this experience in some way or another.

I don't think it's as anti-feminist as a lot of people think. It's like where else on TV were you seeing powerful women, being loud, being obnoxious, being assertive, making their own money? Where else were you seeing that when the Real Housewives came up?

Even the show it was essentially kind of modeled on, which was – what was that show on ABC? The housewives show?

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**FT:** Oh, Desperate Housewives?

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**SB:** Desperate Housewives. Yeah. Even Desperate Housewives was really about housewives. They didn't have careers, I don't think. I don't remember it that well. But the reality is, is it did show women in a different way. Sometimes in an unflattering way. But also as powerful, and having agency, and getting angry and having fights and then being fine. And that's like not a thing we were seeing a lot on our TVs when that came out. Ain't that kind of wild?

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**FT:** No. And I wonder, too, how the political landscape has influenced how media gets delivered, and scripted, and cast and all of that. I don't think it's a coincidence that – well, going back to Monica Lewinsky, that her story gained a lot more attention and empathy as we saw Hillary Clinton running for office. It was almost like – okay. Now we're talking about the Clintons again. Let's revisit this time in our history.

And at that time – I don't know. I mean, there was obviously – there was an anti-Hillary movement. There were obviously many who were in favor of Hillary. But I think, in some ways, the politics at the time at the very minimum gave a story, like Monica's story, an opportunity to resurface with more honesty and more reflection because of like what was happening politically.

And I wonder what comes first. The media or the politics? I don't know. How do you see that relationship working in terms of like just today's – like, even the housewives? Our ability to have – to cast a lesbian. It's like the cultures where it's at and is ready for it. But, also, politically too, in some ways.

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**SB:** Yeah. I think it is really intertwined. You know? It's kind of impossible to decouple kind of what's happening culturally and then the ways in which the culture has actually moved forward by the pop culture we consume, right? Yes, I think we're just more accepting of gay people. But does it make a difference for a lot of people to see Jenna Lyons as representation of a lesbian who is not like by, or trying to figure it out, or whatever, which they I think they have had on the show before? But is just a woman who is like, "I'm a lesbian. That's a fact. It's not a big deal."

Yeah, I think that actually probably does help shift the culture forward, but also is a reflection of the culture. It's kind of this thing that happens on a lot of levels, right? It's the way we feel about gay marriage. It's the way we feel about domestic violence. It's the way we feel about sexual assault. Those things slowly start to take shape in a cultural conversation. Then they're moved forward or backwards in our pop culture and then they start to take a new shape.

And I think that's actually – it's what we're sort of really interested in, right? Jess and I. That's why we're focusing on these topics. Because I think the way even we covered stories has impact. There's responsibility. And I think it's important to sort of acknowledge that responsibility and ask questions about it so that maybe we do better the next time.

[0:28:36]

**FT:** Have we talked about Luke and Laura enough? I want to know. I feel like I've touched on it. We've touched on it. But what do you think we haven't said enough about this particular – which you kick off the entire season with, this one? Clearly, this has a special place in your heart.

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**SB:** Yeah. I think we've covered it enough. And also, I want people to listen to the episode. We should just –

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**FT:** Yeah. Not all of it.

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**SB:** – and let people sort of explore it for themselves. But mostly, what I hope that people take away from this is also just the sense that you're like learning about the larger culture. And this is just a way into that larger conversation.

What I always say, and my friends kind of tease me about, is that what I hope it feels like to listen to the podcast is that you're just a brunch with two friends and they happen to be having a conversation about something you know less about. You're just kind of listening and hanging out with them. And, hopefully, that's the vibe people get from it.

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**FT:** Well, I'll certainly be listening. And one of – I listened to the first episode with Luke and Laura. I won't say anything more about it, about that. But one thing that you did bring up was just that, back in the 80s, how many people watched a television moment versus today? We have so many options. Everything is so fragmented.

Getting 40 million people or whatever, it was 200 – how people watch? 30 million people to watch anything today is unpractical. It doesn't happen. Two million is actually considered good ratings.

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**SB:** Yeah. Oh, two million would be great ratings. Yeah. I mean, there's the Super Bowl. There's like some award shows. There's some moments that we still watch like that. But the idea that you would have two days in the middle of the day where you got 30 million viewers, that's just not possible.

I mean, the fact is because people took the day off work, you know? I mean, people really saw this as a real wedding in some strange way. I don't know what has that kind of stranglehold over the culture now.

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**FT:** Yeah, what does? I was going to ask, what has replaced television?

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**SB:** I mean, it's so interesting. I'm trying to think of the last kind of television event the country – we all watch together. Obviously, sports all sort of still gather people. And then, I guess presidential elections or debates maybe.

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**FT:** Succession on HBO?

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**SB:** When you look at the numbers for Succession, it's so small in comparison, right? That's also a very narrow part of the population.

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**FT:** Sliced.

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**SB:** I'm trying to think if like there's been a thing like that that we've all watched as a country. I mean, I really can't think of something. Even like Harry and Meghan's wedding, I don't think. I mean, certainly, millions and millions of people watched it, but not in the same cultural way. I don't remember it feeling like a moment in the same way. But I'm also not like a deep Royalist. Maybe for people who are really into the Royals, it felt the same way. I don't know. Did you watch that wedding?

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**FT:** I did. And as you're speaking, I'm wondering. Because the culture is so split on Meghan and Harry in terms of what is their motif? Should we feel empathy? I mean, they are – how could she not know? She was entering this family with deep racist roots and traditions. And, like, really? You didn't realize they were going to be a little like uncomfortable with you? Not to excuse them.

But I wonder if, in 10 years, we look back at the way the media created this almost like – the media does this. Because you said, it's a business. They want to create two sides.

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**SB:** Yeah.

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**FT:** It's to their benefit. Because it keeps the culture, it keeps the discourse going. It keeps the magazine selling. It keeps the ratings high. And like is there one truth that we're going to find –

[0:32:27]

**SB:** Is it? Right? I mean, I think we know there is some truth. There's always complex – truth is complex inherently. And so, I think what's interesting about Meghan is just looking at the ways in which she's been dismissed.

Whether you're a Meghan fan and or not, right? It kind of doesn't matter in the scheme of things. The question is, is how has she been portrayed? And how she's been portrayed is sort of like a Lady Macbeth character. In the background, pulling the strings. Harry is kind of seen as this innocent who would still be with the royal family if it weren't for this woman. This Jezebel who's come in and stolen him away from like his loving family.

And we know that story is not real. That's a really complicated, not loving family in a lot of ways. I mean, I think it's a very complicated – I don't want to say toxic. But it seems like a really difficult family to navigate, right? No question when you read about it.

[0:33:29]

**FT:** Well, it's also a very difficult media machine you're up against. You have the American media machine. You have the British, the Royal media power. The firm as Harry has called it. We'll never know, of course, unless someone –

[0:33:43]

**SB:** We won't know. And also, I don't know that Harry would still be in England participating in the Royal family in the same way if it weren't for Meghan. What if that's just what Harry was going to do? What if that was just Harry's journey? And part of the reason he chose this woman is he saw her as being the person that would help him navigate the world in that way. Do you

know what? I mean, I think it's just interesting that we always kind of – agency on the woman and we treat the man as like innocents who are being led astray.

[0:34:14]

**FT:** Yeah. Right. Right.

[0:34:15]

**SB:** You know? It's the Adam and Eve story, right? It's like men are just these naive babies roaming through the Earth and women are tempting them with the apple. And that's just not how life works. And, by the way, in my experience, not how relationships work.

[0:34:33]

**FT:** Well, one of my favorite Greek characters, Medea, who obviously – no sympathy for Medea. She killed her kids. But she also had a terrible husband.

[0:34:47]

**SB:** Right. I mean, it's like –

[0:34:48]

**FT:** And I feel like the way – it goes back. Our approach to all of this and our instincts, or like how to feel immediately around all sorts of these cultural issues, it's like we have been just conditioned to just see the women as necessarily the ones who are the ones who are stirring the pot, you know? And the ones who have – they have the motives. And they're the ones not to be trusted. And the men are just kind of like bumbling idiots, I guess?

[0:35:14]

**SB:** Yeah. Another great example of that, there's another episode we do, is on Amy Fisher. And I don't know if you remember the Amy Fisher story. But Amy Fisher was 16 having yes and affair, I guess is what you'd call it, with a 38-year-old man. But that is just statutory rape. He was literally also her pimp. He was having her work for this escort service that he –

[0:35:38]

**FT:** I did not know that.

[0:35:39]

**SB:** There's all these details you don't know about that case. Because the way it was presented by the media, the way these stories get flattened is, again, that she was this vixen, she was the seductress. The 16-year-old girl had led him astray. And they literally called her a Lolita, the Long Island Lolita.

And Lolita, in literature, is someone who is kidnapped by her stepfather and sexually abused by him. But if you look at the Merriam-Webster Dictionary definition now, it is a precociously seductive girl. It has literally morphed in society into a seductress, as a child seductress, which is just wild that that even exists as a concept. How many little girls are going around seducing men? Not many, you know?

[0:36:31]

**FT:** Right. He was a big guy too. Let's just say physically large.

[0:36:33]

**SB:** Yeah. And he did appear as like kind of a buffoon. Again, it was the thing you're talking about, which is like she was seen as having agency, as like plotting and planning. And he was seen as just like this dumb buffoon just mumbling his way through life, which is like, "Is that fair?" I don't think so. He was literally – his nickname at the time was Joey Coco-Pops, because he was a cocaine dealer for all the escorts in the area.

These stories don't get told, you know? Because the media doesn't like – I mean, I want to say this fairly. Because I am part of the media. But I do think one thing that happens is stories get flattened and become two-dimensional. And a lot of the complexities get lost. And we don't know that because we're just consuming what's given to us.

[0:37:23]

**FT:** Well, I have big hopes for, in retrospect, your podcast. I hope that it's not just starts conversations, but that it then leads to more investigation or more media covering this in addition to your podcast. But maybe there's a follow-up article or there is a big conversation on social media that happens around it. I just think that it's such fertile ground for –

[0:37:45]

**SB:** Yeah. And we're hopeful that it will – just for people think about these things a little differently. And I want people to ask the questions you're asking, right? Which is like what am I consuming today? What am I accepting today in terms of a narrative that may not be fair or right?

I just think that we are in a time where media literacy is not very good and really is something we should all be trying to do better. And this is another way in which you can sort of critically look at what you're consuming and ask yourself questions about it and be a little more thoughtful about what assumptions you're making, right? Because I think we could all do that in life in terms of the pop culture we consume, the way we navigate the world. That's just a good life advice, I think, you know?

[0:38:36]

**FT:** Yes. Yes. It's a brilliant idea for a podcast. And thank you to Miss Dolly Parton for giving us the space and the quiet to do this episode.

[0:38:48]

**SB:** Yeah, she managed to keep it together the whole time. I'm really proud of you, Dolly.

[0:38:55]

**FT:** We're proud of you. I'm proud of you, Susie Banikarim and Jessica Bennett, co-host of In Retrospect. Listeners, if there's a cultural moment from your past that you want to explore or you're wondering, "Would it look different today in retrospect?" Susie and Jessica go there. And they highly recommend you subscribe to their podcast, which just launched.

[0:39:14]

**SB:** Yeah, just launched. And, Farnoosh, thank you so much for having me. I'm such a big fan of your podcast. And I love all the advice you give. And I take it. And it's just such a pleasure to get to talk to you in this formal way.

[0:39:29]

**FT:** Yeah, I know. Because, normally, it's just a lot of trash-mouthing.

[0:39:33]

**SB:** Yeah, there's a lot more gossip involved if this was just a phone call. We're good Iranian girls, you know? We're good Iranian girls. We know how to do a good gossip session.

[0:39:42]

**FT:** You know it. We invented it. Susie, thank you so much.

[0:39:47]

**SB:** Thank you for having me.

[OUTRO]

[0:39:51]

**FT:** Thanks again to Susie for joining us. You can subscribe and listen to In Retrospect everywhere you love to listen to podcasts. *A Healthy State of Panic* is out on October 3rd. Pre-order my book now and you will get access to my three-video lesson plan Scared Smart, which gives you a head start on a lot of the themes in *A Healthy State of Panic Helping you navigate your financial fears*. You'll also get the introduction to the book and a free workbook. Go to [ahealthystateofpanic.com](http://ahealthystateofpanic.com). This bonus expires at midnight on October 2nd.

I'll see you back here on Friday for Ask Farnoosh. Until then, I hope your day is so money.

[END]