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0:00:02.4 Nicole Antoinette: Welcome to Season Two of The Pop-Up Pod, where my guests and I are exploring one big and juicy question, "How much money is enough?" I'm your host Nicole Antoinette, self-employed, partnered but not married, child free by choice, and I've had a somewhat roller coaster history of experiencing up and down class changes throughout my entire life. My parents filed for bankruptcy when I was 14 years old, and I have been obsessed with personal finance ever since. And so the question that we're exploring this season, "How much money is enough?" it's a question that I think about all the time and I can't wait to share today's episode with you. This intimate conversation is 100% listener funded, paid for by my sliding scale Patreon community, that means that you won't hear any ads or sponsors on this show. It's just me, backed by the support of 400+ people who have come together to ensure that everyone involved in making this podcast gets paid. That includes me as the host and creator, my sound engineer and musician, Adam Day, as well as every single one of our guests. Our Patreon community also funds the creation of a full transcript for each episode which you can find in the show notes to help make these conversations more accessible.

0:01:12.6 NA: Those are our production ethics here at The Pop-Up Pod and if that aligns with your own values, I would love to invite you to come check out our community at nicoleantoinette.com/Patreon. In the meantime, I'm excited to introduce you to today's guest, Bear Hebert. Bear, whose pronouns are They/Them, is an anti-capitalist business coach and social justice educator who's been self-employed since 2014. They helped fellow small business people and other beloved weirdos, figure out how to make enough money, market their work, and build thriving businesses without selling their souls to the capitalist machine. In this conversation, we talk about the process of determining your 'enough number', as well as the benefit of having both, a survival budget, and a thriving budget. Bear shares some of the most common misconceptions people have about anti-capitalism, and we talk about the nuanced both end, of wanting to live a good life under an oppressive system, while also working toward a radically re-imagined and more equitable world. I have personally worked with Bear for business coaching for almost 2 years now, and their guidance, insights, teaching and support have deeply impacted the way that I think about money, business and enough-ness, and I am just so happy that you get to meet them today. Okay, here we go.

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0:02:38.5 NA: Alright, here we go. Bear, welcome to the show.

0:02:40.4 Bear Hebert: Thanks so much for having me here.

0:02:42.1 NA: Any excuse to interview you, I will take it.

[chuckle]

0:02:47.1 NA: Here's where I would love to start, kind of as a way for you to introduce yourself. Can you share where does your current money come from? Meaning like what do you do for work?

Or if you're financially supported by someone else? Or if you're living off savings or credit cards? Talk to us about that.

0:03:03.9 BH: So right now, my money comes from this very tiny business that I run. I'm self-employed, it's just me. And yeah, all my money comes from the money that I make from that business. I work as a radical business coach, business consultant for other small business people. I think my spreadsheet says... My revenue spreadsheet says that that work makes up about two-thirds of my income, and at least so far this year, and then the other third comes from teaching classes. So I teach classes about marketing, and I teach classes about unlearning patriarchy for men, and that stuff makes up the other third of the income that I make. So that's where the money is coming from.

0:03:46.0 NA: That's where the money comes from.

0:03:47.2 BH: Yeah, I'm implicitly out of debt at this moment, and I'm not financially partnered in any kind of way with family or with romantic partners, so.

0:04:00.1 NA: Have you been financially partnered in the past?

0:04:02.7 BH: Yeah. I've had one partner who we had... We never fully merged, we never like... We never even opened a bank account, but we shared a home and so split expenses. And he made a lot more money than I did, so we divided up the expenses in accordance with our respective incomes. And so I felt... Yeah, I felt emotionally and financially supported by that arrangement. It took a lot of pressure off of my own having to make a ton of money, so not that he was making a ton of money either, but he was making more than me, he had a Job-job. [chuckle]

0:04:40.9 NA: A job-job. [chuckle]

0:04:44.0 BH: I've only ever been self-employed or waited tables, so I've never had a job-job in that kind of way.

0:04:48.7 NA: Yeah. What's something that you wish people were more honest about when it comes to their financial lives? Like if you had your X-ray binoculars on and could get to know... What are the secret details that you are interested in from other people?

0:05:03.1 BH: That's such a good question. The story that comes to mind immediately is just how are people... How are people acquiring property? I think we've talked about this before, actually, that at some point, a lot of my friends, a lot of people around me started buying houses, and I was really just like, "How are you all doing this?" And there was not a lot of open or honest conversation about where the money was coming from for people to be able to do that. And because I think for me, especially at that time, the thought of having enough money to put a down payment down for a house, for instance, even in a city like New Orleans, where the cost of living is so much lower than in lots of other major cities, that that number seemed so far out of reach for me. I was just like, "It's gotta be coming from somewhere, where is it coming from?" And I started asking people how... I just started asking really directly, "How did you do that? Where is the money from?"

0:06:02.8 BH: And of course, totally unsurprisingly, it turns out that almost everyone who was able to buy a house, at least in my friend group at that point, had some kind of financial support from family that they were like, "Oh yeah, they had... ", their parents had a nest egg, they had money from a grandparent, mom or dad was co-signing on the loan. There was somebody who was putting up money for the down payment that wasn't them. Yeah, and I feel like we really... There's such a sense of sort of accomplishment and personal goal reaching whenever people buy a house, that people did not wanna be super transparent about the fact that they weren't doing it all on their own, 'cause it really fits with a lot of the myth of individual acquisition, so...

0:06:41.0 NA: That's interesting. When you were talking, the question that popped into my head was how did these folks respond when you were asking those point-blank questions? And yeah like were they comfortable with it? I feel like there's some friends that, from the beginning of our friendship, we've been really open about money. And then there's some people that I think would be very squirrely if I asked them those questions.

0:07:00.3 BH: Yeah, yeah, I think there was a mix. Some people who were sort of relieved to just have somebody who they could say, "I'm doing this and it's not my own... It's not of my own making." And then there were definitely people who were a little bit cagier in their answers. [chuckle]

0:07:19.1 NA: Yeah. Is home ownership something that's... Is that like a financial goal of yours?

0:07:24.4 BH: Not at all. I don't know, I've been a renter forever. In some ways, I really like renting and prefer it because there's a lot of... The kind of... Renting with a bad landlord is a total nightmare, and renting with a decent landlord can actually be really great, I found it to be really stress-relieving in my life, especially when I look around at my friends who are homeowners and see the kind of cost burden there. And I think living in New Orleans for the entirety of my adult life... At some point, I don't know, 10 or 15 years ago, I looked around and I was like, "Oh, this is... Buying a house in New Orleans because of climate change, this is not a good long-term investment. This is not gonna be a property that retains its value in the long term." And I was never financially savvy enough, or interested in being financially savvy enough to wanna buy a house for any other reason other than to live in it forever. I never was interested in buying property as an investment. And so thinking of it as like a long-term place to live, it's just like, "Oh yeah, New Orleans, that's not the place to do that thing." So I think I sort of opted out in my mind a long time ago.

0:08:33.6 NA: Yeah, that... I don't know what people say about how, "Renting is just throwing money away", that never felt true to me at all. Like what you get in exchange for your rent money in addition to a place to live is first of all, the freedom to leave, like the flexibility to not be stuck there. And then, like you said, with a good landlord, being able to not have to take on the costs of maintenance. Like places where I've lived, where, "Oh, this thing happened to the pipes," or where this is like, "Okay, cool. You come deal with it." And obviously, if they don't come deal with it, that is a problem, but... Yeah, the flexibility of being able to leave. My former spouse and I bought and owned a house together, and it's funny that we did that because that was never something that I

wanted, that was never a marker of success for me. And so when we did have it, I felt like... First of all, we didn't own the house, the bank owned the house, right. Let's be clear about that. And then the mortgage felt like monopoly money, it didn't feel real, and it was always just such a weird, almost cognitive dissociation for me where I'm like, "I guess I own this house? Do I? I don't know." It's... Yeah, anyway...

0:09:33.7 BH: I was just gonna say, I think the freedom piece for me is also... Has been a priority. And yeah, I think the sort of... "Is stability and security a goal of yours?" versus... Yours, being mine, being any of ours, "Is stability and security the thing that I'm after?" or, "Is flexibility and freedom the thing that I prioritize?" And I think that that's really... The answer to that question has informed a lot of the ways that I've tried to make financial decisions, so.

0:10:03.2 NA: Yeah. Will you tell me your... I guess what I will call, your class experience story? I feel like that's another good 'get to know you' type of question to ask at the top, and maybe they provide some context for the rest of what we're gonna talk about.

0:10:18.7 BH: Yeah, totally. I grew up in South Louisiana and my family is working class. There was a chunk of time where my mom was a single parent, and for that period of time I think we qualified as legitimately poor, we were on financial assistance, government assistance for some years when I was a kid. We moved a lot, lived in rental apartments that were cheap, had some food and security kind of stuff in the earlier parts of my childhood. My mom got remarried when I was 9, I guess, and... Or got re-partnered when I was 9, and moving into a household again that had double income really changed things. And I think my mom and my step-dad really pursued the dream of ascending into more firmly middle class financial footing and succeeded at that. And so now my mom is a homeowner and there's stuff that's there for her financially, that wasn't there when I was a kid.

0:11:19.4 BH: And I think as an adult on my own, I'm 38 now... In my early 20s, I put myself through college with a combination of state tuition scholarships and waiting tables, I waited tables for 11 years, 12 years. And yeah, working in restaurants was my kind of class, that was my class experience, I worked in service industry. I'm the first person in my family to get a college degree, which is not exactly a money thing, but it's not not a money thing. And so that feels relevant too. And then, yeah, just in the last, I would say, three or four years, I've started to make more money in my small business. And so now I make the income of a firmly middle class person. And I still feel a little bit at [chuckle] a loss for what that means or how to show up in the world with this new amount of money that I have. But yeah, I've gotten myself out of debt now, so that feels like a real kind of middle class thing, 'cause... Yeah, I lived on... I supplemented my income with credit cards for a long time and now that's not true for me anymore. And yeah, so I've had a sort of mix of poor working class and middle class life and class experiences.

0:12:36.2 NA: Yeah. Will you give us some examples of maybe some of the ways in which your particular upbringing, when it comes to class, or your younger experiences... Like how you see that popping up in your adult life? Like you just mentioned, okay, now you're making a middle class amount of money... And obviously folks can't see you on video like I can, but you did a very big

shrug emoji, right, with your hands... And so I'm interested in, if you can point to some specifics of maybe some of the more emotional side of the different facets of your class experience.

0:13:06.0 BH: Yeah, yeah. I think that the one that comes to mind off the top of my head, I think is a little bit maybe counter-intuitive, but I feel like in my childhood, I was really aware of both the fact that we didn't have enough money, and I was really aware that money was available to be gotten. My parents really hustled. They... Neither of my parents ever had a 'salary' job. My mom worked a variety of odd jobs always, always worked hourly-wage jobs. My step-dad also did manual labor and made hourly-wage for that. And so they were always working at least two jobs each, and sometimes more than that. And there's something about that that really influenced the way that I think I have been with my own relationship to money in adulthood, is that... I don't know that they ever said this, but I always sort of understood intuitively that there was like an infinite fount of money available out in the world, if I had the will and the ability to go and get it. So as long as I could work, there was more money that I could go get.

0:14:18.6 BH: And that's really what they did. They worked their day-jobs and then also worked night-jobs, and also worked occasional weekend jobs, and any time there was an opportunity to go get some money, they were like, "Cool, we're gonna go get this money." And that's how they paid for us to have glasses, and braces, and to go on an occasional vacation, and things like that, that otherwise would have been out of reach. And I think that that's really impacted my experience of scarcity or the lack thereof, in adulthood, that I have often had not enough money, but I have always had this idea that I could go get more, like, "Okay, my car broke down, I need a \$700 repair." In my early 20s that was like a catastrophic amount of money to need all of a sudden. And it was like, "Okay, I'm just gonna work doubles at the restaurant for the next 7 to 10 days, and then I'm gonna get this money." And there it was.

0:15:15.4 BH: And so the idea that... I think there's something different that happens, I've seen this in my work with people, that people who grew up with parents who had salary jobs, that there's more of a sense of like... There's just a finite amount of money that is available to you and somebody else controls that. And so there's a real scrappiness that comes from being poor, that comes from being working class, or that can come... For me and my family that came from this experience around money that was just sort of like, "Yeah, we need money and we're gonna go get it." Of course, my parents were mostly able-bodied, and mostly not chronically ill, and had the physical ability to go and do that, but yeah, I feel like that's been a real guiding principle of my entrepreneurship and life as a self-employed person.

0:16:03.6 NA: Yeah. No, that's really fascinating. I am thinking about my own upbringing... And with my dad, who was the one who worked for pretty much all of my childhood, and it was in that kind of salaried position, and that yeah, it felt it was finite. And when he wound up losing that job and we had to... What I will condense into 'not a good financial time'... They wind up filing for bankruptcy and it was something... You just gave me like... Thank you for the therapy... This lightbulb moment of, everything was so hard after that because that scrappy attitude was missing. It had always been like, "Well, this employer just gives me this money", and then when this employer goes away and couldn't find another employer of the same kind that it was sort of like, "Oh, what do

we do?" There wasn't that hustle-mentality, it's interesting. Okay, okay.

0:16:56.3 BH: Yeah. Sidenote, I have a whole nascent blogpost waiting to be written about attachment styles and money, and what it looks like to be a person who either believes in the... How do we wanna call that? Somebody who's trusting in the authority or the power-that-be's, to provide for it in a way that it needs. Or if you're like, "Oh yeah, I already know that this system is gonna fail me, so I gotta be the one that goes and figures it out, I gotta be the one that goes and gets it." And what that has to do with relational trauma, and ancestral lineages, and etcetra, etcetra, etcetra.

0:17:46.0 NA: Great, great. So whenever you do that, you send me this blogpost, I will update the shownotes, right, because here for all of this. So I wanna talk a little bit more about this mindset, because if it's true that you believe that you can just go out and get more money, or acquire more money, or make more money whenever you need to, I'm interested in how that shows up when it comes to 'enough-ness'. Because I could see someone who felt that way, then having the mindset of like, "Well, I'm just gonna get as much money as I can", which obviously, I know is completely the opposite of your values and your practices, but they're obviously had to have been some point where... I don't know if that was a conscious decision for you? But if in theory, you could just make as much money as you wanted, and if that's something that you believe, then how do you then become someone who's like, "I'm actually not gonna do that?"

0:18:33.2 BH: Okay. This is a good question. I've never quite thought about that piece of it in relation to this... The sort of scrappy, go get it mentality. Because I also don't think my parents thought that there was just like enough that... Enough... There was like, always more money to go get if you needed it, but we were always probably gonna be with not quite enough or there was not this idea that they were gonna arrive at wealth. That was never the sort of... It was always survival-oriented rather than... At least the way that I perceived it was that it was always sort of survival-oriented and not based on an idea that there was a... I said before that the font was infinite, but perhaps the font was not actually infinite, maybe there was like... [laughter] Maybe it was finite. Yeah, anyhow, I can ponder that on my own in therapy too, but I... [laughter] But in terms of my own stuff, yeah, I think I really... I haven't been interested in becoming wealthy.

0:19:53.9 BH: That has never been a thing that was appealing to me, and I think some of that is because of my class experiences of like, "Yeah, wealthy peoples are like... Wealthy people suck." [laughter] That was the kind of... I think the thing that I absorbed through osmosis, both through my own family experiences, but also just through living inside the capitalist world where you're like, "Oh yeah, who's abusing power in this system?" Even if nobody in my family was talking about this stuff with any of this kind of analysis, and yet I could look around and see like, something is wrong here, and the people with a lot of money are often the ones who are benefiting off of the exploitation of people with less. And so I think I've had the kind of like, "Oh... " Disinterest, and, yeah, a real judgment about people with a lot of wealth, so I don't feel like I've had to... I haven't had to stop an internalized greed, it's like, the greed was never there, I was always just trying to arrive at enough, and now I have a little more than enough, and that's great, but I've never been super interested in having way too much.

0:21:18.6 NA: So that judgment, that sort of visceral judgment that you just described about people who are wealthy, is that still judgment that you hold?

0:21:26.8 BH: No, it's really not. I think I have a lot of judgment about systems, I think that largely, each of us, we only have so much agency inside these systems, most people who are wealthy did not choose to become wealthy, most people who are wealthy were born into it. I think that people have choices that they can make in and around the wealth that they have or don't have, and I hope that people... I hope that more people continue to make choices that are for the benefit of all of us, and I don't really fault within the realm of middle class and upper middle class experience, I don't really fault people for wanting to have enough to survive and thrive inside of capitalism. Billionaires, that's a different conversation, but for the majority of people who I think would identify as wealthy or having a lot, relatively speaking, they just actually have enough. [chuckle]

0:22:26.3 NA: Yeah, that's relatively speaking, they just have enough, yeah, and it's that so many people don't have enough that positions that as wealth, when, like you said, actual wealth, we're talking about something that is maybe even hard to wrap your mind around like, I can't wrap my mind around like somebody having billions of dollars, I can't imagine that there's any ethical way to amass that amount of wealth.

0:22:50.7 BH: No, I think there are upper limits where it's like, "This is more any one person, any one family could need for many lifetimes over." It's like, yeah, clearly, that is unethical. Clearly, that's in the realm of immorality. But yeah, for folks who are just like, "I have enough for me and my kids," and it looks like wealth, because we're in the system where things are so inequitable, I have less judgment about that. I do think that if we're gonna try to arrive at a place where things are more equitable, there may be some comforts that wealthy people, wealthy middle class people could benefit from giving up for the equity, for the equitability, equitable access for everyone, but, you know, I am not a...

0:23:40.0 NA: Right. Yeah, so I think this is a good segue. I would love to talk about the aspect of your work that was my introduction to you, your online course, Freely, which is An Anti-Capitalist Guide to Pricing Your Work, for other people like you, like me, that have these tiny businesses, right? And I would love to talk about it because I feel like one of the really cool things about this course that you created is that it asks folks to directly consider and dive into the question that we're talking about, which is how much money is enough? Which I will tell you, I don't know that I ever really asked myself that question in such direct terms before taking that class of yours. I have been financially supporting myself my entire adult life, same as you, paid for college, all of that kind of stuff, did not have the family financial safety net, and so I knew how much I needed in terms of, "Okay, these are my bills this month, this is what I need to get by," but it took me a long time to really be able to combine that base, base survival number with any sort of thriving, you know? And this idea of how much money is enough not just to get by at the bare minimum, but to have what we need to thrive. And so I would love to ask you to share more about this, but perhaps we can start with you clarifying what you actually mean when you use the phrase anti-capitalist. So An Anti-capitalist Guide to Pricing Your Work, what does that mean? [chuckle]

0:25:11.0 BH: Yeah, I love this question. Also, you know who loves this question? It's the trolls on the Internet [laughter] who love to be like, "You're not really anti-capitalist." So like I just said, I'm not a financial theorist, I have... I have college degree, but just barely, and finance is not what I studied, and so I think sometimes when you use a term like anti-capitalist, it signals for people some sort of a particular ethos that it's like, "Oh, you're a Marxist, or you're a socialist, or you're a whatever." And I'm not not those things, but I'm also, and when I say anti-capitalist, particularly in that context of this course, when I say anti-capitalist, what I mean is trying to push against the oppressive system that is capitalism. And there's lots of ways to do that. So when I say anti-capitalist, I don't mean, "And now we adhere to this particular ideology or this particular set of ways of being and doing," but instead, "I am sort of emotionally, spiritually against this exploitative system, and anybody else who finds themselves identifying that way, you too can call yourself anti-capitalist and not need to have any more specific of a game plan for how you're gonna show up and not to know that you're not pro-capitalism." [chuckle]

0:26:38.6 NA: Yeah. I mean, I think something that really got in the way for me for a long time is thinking, "Okay, if I'm gonna say that I'm anti-this or anti-whatever, then I have to have whatever the magic plan is for the solution to this thing." Of course, I don't have the solution for what we do instead, but I do think that it's fine to look at something and be like, "All I know is, not this." So I don't actually have to know what would come next in order to orient my life, and my business, and my practices in ways that don't support the thing that I know is hurtful to people, if that makes sense.

0:27:11.5 BH: Yeah, I think that's exactly where I land on it too, is it's just like, anti-capitalist doesn't mean, "And therefore, this is the right answer instead. It just means, not that."

0:27:22.0 NA: Yeah, and any ways that we can chip away at that. So you mentioned the trolls on the Internet, what would you say are some of the common misconceptions that people might have about anti-capitalism?

0:27:32.7 BH: If you're anti-capitalist, you can't make money at all. Like, "If you're anti-capitalist, why are you making money? If you're anti-capitalist, you can't charge money for something. If you're anti-capitalist, why are you charging money for this class? If you're anti-capitalist, it's not okay to make enough money. If you're anti-capitalist, you have to have a particular ideology or plan for what we should do instead of capitalism. If you're anti-capitalist, you can't want to participate in... " Or not even want to, right? If you're anti-capitalist, participating in capitalism is not allowed. And I just don't think any of that is true, it's like... I say this over and over again, but participating in capitalism is not the same thing as being a capitalist, wanting to survive capitalism is not the same thing as loving capitalism and wanting it to flourish. [laughter] So yeah, I think we're really allowed to position ourselves and to be anti-capitalist without opting out of the system entirely. For most of us, there's not a way to stop making money and survive. Yeah.

0:28:47.6 NA: Right. Like opting out of it entirely... I think about for me with sobriety, that not to say that that was easy because it wasn't and isn't, but it is simple in that the... There is no moderation, I just don't drink, right? And like it is something that can be full scale removed from

my life. Money isn't, right? I can think whatever I think about capitalism or money or wealth or wealth hoarding or billionaires or anything that we could spend the next six hours talking about, but I actually can't opt out of that system. I just can't.

0:29:19.0 BH: Yeah. And I think for people who can opt out of it entirely, it's often because I feel like it's people who are sort of at the extreme ends who end up interacting in the world without money at all, a lot of people who are able to... I don't know what, go off grid, live totally self-sufficient, whatever. There's a lot of privilege that's associated with their ability to opt out of the money system, you have to have a lot of money to be able to stop needing it, and for most of us that's not... That's just never gonna be doable.

0:29:52.0 NA: Yeah. Okay, so can you share some examples of how anti-capitalism is built into your own business model? 'Cause I feel like that just laid a good foundation for sort of like what it is and isn't, right? But what does it actually look like?

0:30:02.9 BH: Yeah, it looks like so many different things, I think the main... The place that I always start is just like, "How much money do I need to be making?" And then orienting my business around making enough rather than making an ever-increasing amount more, which that's capitalism in a nutshell is there always has to be more, the number always has to be growing, the goal post is always moving. And so instead orienting around what do I actually need to make, and then how can I build my business in a way that allows for me to actually make what I need, as opposed to make whatever number amount the online business world has decided is the new carrot on a stick. I think you've been around the online business space long enough to remember when six-figure businesses were the thing that people were marketing towards, and then it turned into seven-figure businesses, and now it's like eight-figure businesses or the things that... Some of the "higher-end" online business coaches and marketing coaches and whatnot are marketing with, right? Like that's the carrot that's being dangled now, and it's just... I can't wait to see nine figure, it's coming... [laughter]

0:31:12.1 BH: The number is just gonna keep going up, and so for me, the first piece is just figuring out what's actually enough. Then there's all kinds of other stuff in terms of like, how do I price my work to support that, how do I price my work to also be accessible for other people, and really doing some math calculations around that, making sure that everything I offer has the ability for people to participate at a lower cost, often all the way down to zero. Yeah, really being committed to both my own financial thriving and financial accessibility simultaneously, that feels like a real anti-capitalist principal that I'm trying to work from.

0:31:50.9 NA: Mm-hmm. I want to go into more specifics about all these, but I think, and this might be an overly simple question, but I'm gonna ask it anyway, because you said that the foundation of anti-capitalist business practices for you is orienting around what is enough money and then earning that, how did you figure out what enough money is for you?

0:32:08.8 BH: Yeah, this is sort of what I talk about in the first section of Freely, the online course. But the gist of it is getting really specific about what my needs are, like, "How much money am I

spending on each of the things that I need every month or every quarter, every year?" And then really calculating for that, and not letting it be about how much money do I feel like I need, how much money would I like to have, but really looking at, "What's my rent? What are my utilities every month? How much money am I spending on food? Is that enough? Would I be happier or healthier if I were spending a little bit more on food? Okay, let me build that into the budget." And I found that at the beginning of trying to do these calculations, I often underestimated lots of things and forgot lots of stuff, like... I need to go to the eye doctor once a year. I wear glasses and contacts, I need to go to the eye doctor once a year, that's gonna cost me some chunk of hundreds of dollars, it's gonna be in the \$200-500 range.

0:33:10.2 BH: Okay, that's a thing I have to budget for if I'm actually trying to include all of these things in my budget, in my enough number. If I ever wanna take a vacation, if I wanna be able to take time off if I get sick, if I would like to ever retire. [laughter] If I would like to pay my taxes on time, all of those things have to go into that calculation of what my expenses are, and I do... I try to orient around like, "How can I do with less? How can I... What are the things that I think I might need that I don't actually need?" I haven't owned a car in more than a decade, there's lots of stuff that I save money on [laughter] by being frugal and living simply, and also there's lots of stuff that I spend money on that other people wouldn't wanna spend money on, but I think that that's really a part of it too is being able to self-assess what's important to me, not what does the world say I need, not what do my parents think a good life looks like for me, not what does my partner think we should have, but what actually feels good and right and useful and necessary for me, how do I live a life that's thriving for me, and then to get into the brass tacks, to get into the real nitty-gritty of like, what are the numbers on that thing.

0:34:32.4 NA: Which I honestly think is a revolutionary radical thing, and I have sat down to do this many times, 'cause whether it was like you said, I forgot things the first time around or I wasn't being honest with myself about what I actually needed, maybe I had some shame around certain spending categories of, "There's something wrong with me if I wanna spend this much money on hiking every year," or whatever the thing is that makes each individual person happy, and because I spent so many years... Like, I spent so long at that survival number that I felt a lot of guilt around earning more than that, because technically I actually don't need to go on hikes, but it's one of the things that brings me the most joy, and so I feel like it's been important for me to continue to revisit this as I work on some of the more emotional healing aspects as well, because there's the things like I can say, "Okay, yes, rent is this much, or utilities are this much, or food is this much," like I don't have as much of an emotional thing around that, but when you start getting into the things that are maybe more desires than needs, or if you're even redefining what a need is, 'cause we need joy, we need pleasure, we need connection, and not that all of those things cost money...

0:35:42.7 BH: Beauty.

0:35:44.7 NA: Beauty. Right, exactly. All of these, to some degree, money is involved. If I wanna see my best friend who lives across the country, that is gonna take... That is gonna require money, and so it's been like an ongoing work in progress in settling in what is an enough number for me.

0:36:00.0 BH: Yeah, I think some of what's useful there too is to think about... I often coach people to do this particular thing where, okay, make a survival budget, what would you need to like subsistence survive, to be able to just like, pay the rent, pay the bills, buy the food, and not do anything else? Look at that number. Okay, now, start making yourself some modular line items in your budget that's like, "Okay, if what I actually need per month is X amount of money, what would I need to make per month extra in order to pay for a vacation once a year? Or to be able to go on a writing retreat every quarter? Or to be able to take off a month or two of time and go hiking?" Like, what do those numbers look like, and build that in so that, especially for self-employed people, but really for anybody, if your income fluctuates at all because some expense category grew or your income went down or whatever, that you can move those around a little bit, and so then you're building basically a survival budget and a thriving budget.

0:37:00.5 BH: And for a lot of people, we're not gonna arrive from the survival budget to the thriving budget right away, there's gonna be some space, and time, and there's a learning curve of figuring out how to get there, but at least knowing... Okay, at this amount of money, that would be enough and I could stop hustling. I could stop trying to find the rest of the money. I could stop working as much or whatever, once I reached X amount of money, then I could prioritize other things besides going after the money, that that's the part that we never do, and so then we're just stuck in this kind of emotional loop and time loop and relationship with our work loop that has us always chasing the thing, but being able to add in all the pleasure stuff, all the joy stuff, all the beauty stuff as actual line items on your spreadsheet budget or your notebook budget or whatever feels like the right thing for you, that that gives people...

0:37:54.8 BH: It gives... I mean, it has given me any way a real sense of the possibility of completion where it's like, oh, at some point I'm gonna arrive at a place where I'm actually making enough money and I don't need to make more than that every year, and then I can just be like, cool, I've worked enough. Do I feel guilty sometimes that I only see clients three days a week? Yes. But am I making enough money off of the amount of work that I'm doing in a year? Yes, and so then I'm like, okay, that's not a money thing, that's an internal thing, that's an emotional thing, not some like shit for me to heal, instead of like, "Oh, I need to just keep chasing this thing mindlessly."

0:38:32.4 NA: Yeah. A couple of months ago, I made the mistake of doing one of these online calculators that was like based on your age and your education level and the number of years you've been working, it basically tells you where you should be compared to your peers at that point...

0:38:46.9 BH: Oh God.

0:38:48.1 NA: I know it's terrifying. How much I'm under-earning for someone that's like 37 and has a college degree, and what it said that... I don't remember exactly what the numbers were because I think I closed the screen so fast 'cause it made me feel really bad about myself, and then I really had to stop and be like, "I have everything that I want."

0:39:05.8 BH: Yeah.

0:39:05.9 NA: And so there really is an interesting thing there, and I also think part of what has been helpful for me is to remember, I felt... When I first took the Freely course and I was doing these calculations, I felt some resistance to committing to an enough number 'cause I was like, "What if this isn't enough in two years," and I had to remind myself, this is like, this is not a fixed set in stone thing, if your life changes, if someone, if you have a kid, or if any number of things could happen that are gonna change what your enough number is, and it's like being in an ongoing conversation with the enough number, like that's something that I can do.

0:39:38.5 NA: And so for example, my partner and I are living in our own place for the first time, we were living with his dad for 14 months and then kinda living in our vans and doing that, and the house that we're living in, his dad owns and it's been in the family for generations, and it's basically, I now have the privilege of proximity to someone else's generational wealth that we don't have to pay rent or mortgage, it's just utilities and upkeep and that kind of stuff. And something I realized recently is that I'm super grateful for that, and also that I don't want it to be the case that I can only have housing if I'm in this partnership that I need to... I would like to slowly be increasing my income to the point where if we were to break up and I would be the one to move out because it's his family's house, that would be a financial hardship for me because I'm currently earning absolutely enough money for the fact that I don't pay rent, but if that were to change it, and so that was a little oh, light bulb moment for me of enough means being able to pay for housing should I need to pay for housing.

0:40:38.8 BH: Yeah, that's such a good... That's such a good example of that. I think... It's funny actually, I keep wanting to record an addendum to the first part of Freely, because I think the number... The enough number that I calculated for myself back then was \$42,000, which was like three and a half years ago, which was I think probably close to enough actually, I think probably 50 would have been a more accurate enough number for me at that point, \$50,000 a year. But now, I live in a much more expensive city, like a much, much more expensive city than I used to, and it's like, oh shit, I need to make a lot more money, and thankfully, I was already sort of on track to be making a lot more money this year anyway, and so I don't feel a lot of stress about it, but it's been on my... It's been on my agenda to actually go in and adjust my numbers on my spreadsheet, because having a general sense that I need to make more money is a really different thing than having a concrete number of like, this is how much money I need to make this year or this month, or from this program, or when I teach this class or whatever, that that's a really different...

0:41:45.2 BH: I can have a really different internal relationship with the work, if I know here's how much money I actually need, as opposed to just feeling a sense of like, well, my cost of living is so much higher now, therefore I need to feel stressed out, I need to feel like there's not enough. And that kind of like the vagueness, I think, creates a vicious cycle where having the specifics of what enough is creates a virtuous cycle of being able to say, "Here's how much I need, here's how much I'm short of that, so therefore I need to do X amount of work in order to fill that gap," even if I'm not able to fill the gap yet knowing what the gap is specifically is so soothing for the nervous system. For mine anyway.

0:42:26.9 NA: Yeah, I agree with that. I find that there's a lot of comfort in specificity, for sure.

Which makes me wanna ask you, so if you can remember, maybe it doesn't have to be the first time, but like a time when you said, "Okay, this is the thriving enough number that I am striving towards that I wanna get to," and then you get to that. Did it actually feel like enough?

0:42:49.2 BH: It felt so bewildering. It felt like so confusing to be like, "Oh my God, I could just buy some shit and not think about how much I'm spending on it." That was totally wild. Not only did it feel like enough, it felt like way more than enough that I was just spinning around and going like, "What does a person do with all this money?" I had to hire somebody to help me process about it because I was like, I don't understand what to do with all of this surplus.

0:43:16.6 NA: Okay, actually, I'm gonna interrupt you. Will you talk about that, like what kind of person did you hire? What did that look like? Tell me all the... I'm very nosy about this.

0:43:26.3 BH: Yeah, great. I hired Hadassah Damien who runs Ride Free Fearless Money. She's a great money coach and financial educator, specifically for pumps and queers and artists, and other people who historically have both not had enough and identified as not having enough as part of their part of belonging into that sub-culture and... Yeah, and we talked about all kinds of stuff where I was just like, "I don't know, I have no idea how to relate to my spending now, now that I have more than enough," and I sort of accidentally made a bunch of money in 2020 and then was just kind of like...

[vocalization]

0:44:02.9 BH: I don't know.

[laughter]

0:44:06.5 BH: Just totally at a loss for how to manage it, and a lot of what we did actually... I guess I'll say the biggest thing that came from her to me out of that, those couple of sessions was the concept of financial backfill that she introduced to me, which basically means if you have historically lived with not enough or not quite enough, that then suddenly when you have enough, there's this period of needing to backfill some stuff that's been left untended for a period of time.

0:44:41.8 BH: For me, that looked like upgrading my mattress, for instance, which was not a thing that I needed to do, but was like a thing that was gonna make my life, my quality of life perceptibly better, but was the thing I had been putting off because there hadn't been quite enough to justify spending a chunk of money on a better mattress or a majority of my house is furnished with stuff I got from thrift stores and off the side of the road, like things that other people were discarding and it was like, "Oh, I'm actually just gonna buy a \$60 floor lamp so that I can throw out the one that stands at like a 30-degree," it's like knocked over a little bit because it never fully stood up straight because somebody else threw it out because it was crooked and a little bit broken, but it's been basically functional in my living room, and in the past, I never would have... 60 bucks for a lamp is like jeez, that's so much money, why would anybody...

0:45:36.8 BH: Why would I spend that kind of money on a thing that I have a perfectly functional one here that I spent zero dollars on and being able to say, "Okay, yeah, I'm actually gonna go to the dentist, get a new mattress, replace the shit in my house that's actually broken and holding on by a thread," having the financial stability to be able to fill that stuff in, and she really gave so much permission about like, it's okay to have a period of backfill that might last for a year or longer of noticing all the things that you're like, "Oh yeah, I really actually need winter socks that don't have a lot of holes in them," or stuff that you're just like, "Oh yeah, I've been living at the this is good enough level and now I can live at the actually, this is great level."

0:46:20.6 NA: Yeah, and I would imagine that that could feel emotionally uncomfortable 'cause all of a sudden you're spending what feels like so much money.

0:46:28.7 BH: Yeah, so much money. Just like, 60... It's lamp. \$60.

[laughter]

0:46:37.2 BH: In 2020, I bought myself... I bought myself a pair of fancy pants from New Works, this company that makes like... Anyway, shout out to New Works, I'm not... They don't sponsor me or anything though, I would love it if they wanted to, but they make super bright colored handmade garments that I love, and I bought a pair of pants from them that I think were like \$140, and it was the most money I had ever spent on a single garment of clothing, but I bought it for myself as my year-end bonus in 2020, 'cause I had like... [laughter] Made so much money that year, I was like, "Oh my God, I can just buy these nice, beautiful pants that are gonna bring me so much joy and not stress about it," but it feels really tender. Yeah, it feels really tender, I'm not interested in having tons of money to just buy myself frivolous treats forever, but it feels really good to be like, "This is a thing that's beautiful, it's well made, it's ethically made, and I can have that... That's a thing that I can have." And that's okay.

0:47:39.3 NA: Was 2020 the first year that you started saving money, like putting money away for the future?

0:47:46.5 BH: Yeah, it was the first year, I paid off all my debt in 2020, and I guess I came out at the end of the year with a little bit of savings. I had always had a savings account and a checking account because somebody when I was 18 told me that I needed that, but I basically just moved the money back and forth between those and often had zero dollars in one or the other account or like 200 bucks in the savings account to keep it open, but yeah, I had never had a six-month savings, an emergency fund like that, none of that had ever happened, and... Yeah, 2020 into 2021 is the first time that I ever had enough money in that way.

0:48:24.6 NA: Will you share if you're comfortable with it, so if you hadn't been saving before, I would imagine that also as kind of like a freeze like deer in headlights moment. Like what did you do first?

0:48:35.0 BH: When I had enough money or if I... In the past, before...

0:48:39.0 NA: Yeah, no. Yeah, when you were like, "Okay, they're surplus here, I'm gonna start saving." Did that look like, "Oh, I'm gonna open an IRA," or is it just, "I'm gonna try to build an emergency fund," I'm curious what your first few steps were in that space.

0:48:50.0 BH: Yeah, I think this is some of also what Hadassah helped me figure out was like, what do I do with this money? And she was the one who was like, okay, first, you make a six... Open another savings account, that's your six-month emergency fund, make a taxes savings account, and I had never had that before, and so I was always behind on my taxes because I didn't have the money to pay it in the year that it was owed. I needed all 18,000 of the dollars that I had made and being self-employed, they want 3000 to 5000 of that 18,000, and I was just like, I don't... I spent it all already, it's not here, so I was back on... Owed a bunch of back taxes because of that, so yeah, having a tax savings account, paying off the debt, six-month emergency fund tax savings account, I think that was the order of operations for suddenly having a little bit more than enough.

0:49:38.6 NA: Yeah, I wanna talk about retirement savings or investing, because there's something that I've been thinking about, not that I think you're gonna have the perfect answer or that there is a perfect answer, but I think that there's sort of a nuanced both and of thriving under capitalism while also holding the values that we have, wanting to work toward a radically re-imagined and more equitable world, which to be honest, I often struggle with the mental gymnastics of this, and I'll give you an example and maybe that can be a jumping off point. So investing for retirement, using an IRA or 401k, anything that's invested in the stock market, 'cause that's essentially, to my understanding, our best bet for having a future in that regard, that's how... How that savings is happening, [0:50:21.5] knowing that I will only be able to earn the money that I need in the stock market if capitalism continues to thrive, that there's some kind of mental thing that I have around this where it's like... It's the best available option. So I'm gonna do it. But in order for my retirement money to continue to grow, like the economy has to continue to outperform, outperform, outperform in this rampant unchecked growth way that exploitatively, I don't believe in. I don't know if any of this is landing for you as a question, but I'm sort of just like... What do we do with that?

0:51:00.2 BH: Yeah, I think... I'm sort of the exact wrong person to ask about this because I have done nothing in this department, I don't have an IRA, I don't have any stock market investments, this is definitely not a realm that I've touched yet, and I sort of feel like it's been in my consciousness that now I'm making enough money that it's a thing that I maybe could touch at some point soon, and I haven't yet, and so yeah, I'm happy to have the theoretical conversation, but I have zero... Zero life experience to bring to this.

0:51:37.9 BH: Yeah. Very interested though in your theoretical thoughts, because if it... 'Cause when you just said it's something that you haven't done yet, it sounds like potentially it's a step that you would take maybe as opposed to a step that you're like, "I'm morally against this," which also would be a fine stance, I don't know this concept that you have mentioned to me, which potentially you got from Hadassah this idea of we deserve to have a future, that it's like if we deserve to have a future, and if there will be no inherited family wealth or there will be no safety net to that regard,

we have to save that money and create that future for ourselves, and unless you're gonna be engaged in some form of wage labor up until you die, which is certainly not a guarantee that you would even be able to do that, the compound interest is... It's necessary and yet it's predicated on this thing that I don't believe, so yes, I would love to hear your knee-jerk theoretical thoughts.

0:52:27.6 BH: Yeah. I guess the first thing I wanna say is, again, I don't fault anyone individually for participating in the system. It's the best option that we have in a lot of ways, short of burning it all down, which I also am pro, but we're not there yet, right. And so figuring out how to survive inside the system as it stands, I don't hold any individual person responsible for their participation in the system, even if your participation in the system is upholding its existence, what a paradox. The big imaginative part of me thinks like, is there something else we could do? Is there something else we could invest in besides the stock market? Is there a way that we could invest in each other or grassroots systems of care or... I don't know what shared funds where... Are there other more imaginative ways, like I find myself at a loss for even how to articulate what I think might be possible, but I think that that's really the idea that the stock market is the only functional available option, therefore, I'm just gonna do that and not think about it, that seems really dangerous to me. Choosing to invest in the stock market does not seem like morally reprehensible to me, but mindlessly doing that and not thinking about like, is it possible for me to opt out of this in any way?

0:54:02.8 BH: Is it possible for me to put energy or money towards some other something somehow, like that to me feels like the actual call, like how do we get out of the kind of lack of imagination that kind of... We're just doomed to keep doing this thing mentality, and instead be like, "Alright, what would an expansive, beautiful, generative liberatory version of retirement funding look like?" And that's a conversation I'm really interested in having. I don't have all the skills and tools and knowledge to know what an answer to that might be, but that feels like a thing that's worth inquiring about.

0:54:40.8 NA: Yeah, I mean, I think that's a beautiful question. I feel very... When I said before, the kind of deer in headlights, that's sort of how I feel with that, and that's like a good... I feel like that's a good indication, that is something that's worth thinking about, and I also think like this is a topic at which it's helpful as always to remind myself that things don't have to be all or nothing, right. It's the same way of like, okay, I can invest in my IRA and also practice wealth redistribution, which I do, and so it's like looking at how do the puzzle pieces come together that make up our values instead of looking for what is the most perfect... Like there isn't a perfect solution to any of this.

0:55:20.4 BH: No. Yeah, and I think the other thing too is like none of us is gonna solve this alone, and so how can we... I feel like so much of the theory around retirement is about individual self-sufficiency, and I'm really interested in what does it look like for us to design for communal collective reliance instead of individual self-sufficiency? And I don't know what that looks like, but I think there are models. I think there are places that it's happening on a micro scale. I think there are indigenous communities that never stopped doing things this way, I think there are lots of places where people have opted out or have not been given access to the sort of White, upper middle class traditional way of doing things, of ensuring individual survival, and instead have done things in a much more collective way, and I think that's of use for us to remember one that that exists, and two,

that it's something any of us could also choose to opt into.

0:56:23.0 NA: Yeah, I appreciate the invitation that you're essentially giving me, giving everyone who's listening to be more imaginative, and I think sometimes when systems are so big or so prevalent or have been what has been in place for our entire lives, it's easy for me to forget that capitalism, especially like this late stage capitalism, I know you and I are both in the US, we're talking about things from here that... This hasn't been the way that it has been forever. Maybe you can talk a little bit about the difference between commerce and capitalism, or... I think that's an... It's helpful for me to remember that things haven't always been this way.

0:57:01.8 BH: Yeah, I'm gonna butcher this quote, but maybe we can find the right version of it and put it in the show notes, but I... This is making me think of that Ursula K. Le Guin quote where she talks about capitalism seems inescapable, so did the divine right of kings. That in medieval Europe, the divine right of kings seemed inevitable, seemed inescapable, seemed permanent and forever, and it's not, right. It's not, it hasn't always been this way, It won't always be this way in the future, and the sort of throwing up our hands if we can't find a perfect solution that I'm just not gonna try, I think that's a real... It's a real risk, it's a real dangerous pattern to let ourselves fall into, and that being willing to be kind of in the messy middle of like, This is neither a perfect solution nor a total opting out is a really important skill for us to build.

0:57:58.6 NA: Yeah, yeah, definitely.

0:58:00.3 BH: I think I didn't actually answer the question that you asked, which was like talking about capitalism and... Versus commerce. Yeah, that distinction has been so helpful for me, particularly as a small business person who sells things, to let myself off the moral hook a little bit about selling. I wish that we lived in a sort of non-monetary system where all transactions happened on a microscale and all the... I could get all the things that I needed from immediately around me, and all the things that I offered were needed by the people immediately around me, and we just lived on an economy of trust, but in fact, that's not the world that I live in, and so...

0:58:40.7 BH: We're in this commercial system where buying and selling is a vast majority of how we're interacting with each other, and so for me, really letting it be okay that what I do to get money is sell my services, I sell my time, I sell my knowledge, I sell my perspective and letting that be an imperfect okay thing, has given me so much spaciousness in terms of how I am running my business and how I'm interacting with my clients, how I'm doing sales, how I'm feeling when the money comes into my bank account, all of those things, there's so much more spaciousness around it, and I think because capitalism is so pervasive, it's so sort of all powerful. For at least all of us living in the US right now, we've conflated capitalism and Commerce, and so all selling happens inside of capitalism right now, so then we think the capitalism is bad, therefore selling is bad and being able to untangle those things from each other and say, Capitalism is based on toxic growth, it's based on exploitation, it's based on scarcity, it's based on never having enough...

0:59:56.6 BH: And selling doesn't have to be based on those things I can do selling in a way that is rooted around having enough, having an appropriate amount of more than enough that is based on

reciprocity with my clients and with myself instead of these capitalist values. There's so much ease and spaciousness and permission inside of that for me to now really feel good about selling things, 'cause I'm just like, "Oh yeah, I'm just offering these things to people so that I can make enough money, I'm trying to be in right relationship with my clients, I will not always do things perfectly, and all of that's okay."

1:00:34.0 NA: Yeah, I mean because the exchange of goods and services has always existed and will always exist because we need things, we need each other, and so kind of having that perspective. Yeah, I'm interested if there's a couple of specific things that you can point to that you have either done or changed the way that you do that has made selling feel more joyful.

1:00:58.0 BH: Yeah. So one of the things that has really opened up selling for me is pricing my work based on how much money I need to make, and having that price be not just an arbitrary vague idea of what I think I might want to make or what the going rate is, or what I think I ought to be able to charge based on the training or experience that I have, but really based on the specifics of what I need, then I feel so fully okay in asking for the price that I'm charging from people, because I know that it's based on what I need. And so then, I'm not trying to extract anything from people, I'm not trying to get more than what I need from anyone, and so then whenever I get into a sales conversation with somebody, I can say the cost for this program is \$3300, period, that's just a fact. And that fact is based on how much money I need to make from the work that I can do, and that has created so much space for me inside of those conversations, and it's magical because it has also created so much space for the people on the other side, because then I'm not trying to convince anyone that they should give me that money or cajole them or manipulate them, or push in any particular direction.

1:02:21.0 BH: It's just like, "Here's what it costs. Does that work for you?" And if the answer is yes, then great. I am delighted to take money from people who want to give me money for my services, [chuckle] I'm so happy to get the money when people are able to give it to me, and I don't have guilt about that because I know that I'm charging what I need and I know that I'm in a consent-based conversation with people and they're giving it to me if they can, and the other thing that makes that possible is that I have lower income options, so for people who \$3300, for instance, is a totally astronomical, undoable amount of money, there are ways for those people to still be able to work with me, and so when I say, "Is that a number that's doable for you," somebody could also say no, and then we can have an easy conversation about that too, and that for me, has really made it so that I no longer have a lot of angst when I get on a sales call with anyone or an inquiry call, you know, is it a good fit for us to work together, kind of call.

1:03:23.4 NA: Yeah. What you're describing to me seems like a very clear way to interrupt. Certainly what I was taught when it comes to online business or marketing, or maybe this is just kind of acquisition in general, that if you are the person who is providing the thing that you should be trying to get the most money possible for the least amount of work, and if I am the person who's buying the thing that I should be trying to get the most possible thing for the least amount of money, and it puts the creator and the consumer at Perpetual odds as opposed to being in any kind of collaborative relationship, and what you are describing to me seems to interrupt that in a way.

1:04:01.8 BH: Yeah, I think that dynamic of get the most for the least. I talk about that in Freely, it is like the psychological root of extraction, right. It's like how the extraction and exploitation shows up in our interpersonal relationships, of course, it also shows up in much more harmful ways on a large scale, but inside of a small business, for instance, it's what the relational dynamic defaults to if we don't interrupt it, otherwise, if we don't offer an alternative, and I don't think this is my own... Not to toot my own horn too much on this, but I feel like it really... I have gotten feedback from people, even if we don't end up working together, that that sales conversation has felt really healing for people to just be able to say, "Yes, I want this at this price, no, I don't want this at this price", like "Yes, this is a number that's doable for me, no, it's not." And that being able to have that conversation not feel so emotionally fraught, but to just feel really clear has felt really illuminating for people, and it's been illuminating for me too, to just see how much of that shows up in our relationships in really unchecked and unacknowledged ways.

1:05:14.1 NA: Definitely. So I'm gonna ask what I assume the follow-up question is for folks who just listened to everything that you shared, which is, what happens when you're on a call and someone says, "No, that doesn't work for me." And I ask because earlier in the conversation, you were talking about that sweet spot of being able to make sure that you are thriving, and you didn't use these words, but not martyring yourself for your values essentially, because I think that that is like an archetype or a behavioral pattern that I have certainly fallen into this over-giving under earning, where you wind up resentful because your needs aren't being met, and that's not necessarily the fault of the people who are buying the things, if that's how you've set it up. So I'm interested for you, like again, someone's on the call, they say, "No, this doesn't work for me," kind of more tangibly than what happens, and how do you, I guess, keep yourself in that space where you're thriving and in alignment with your values and not martyring yourself in order to be, I guess like the cheapest service provider out there...

1:06:11.7 BH: Yes. Okay, I have three thoughts. Let me see if I can make them... Make sense in some kind of order.

1:06:15.9 NA: Great. Love it.

1:06:17.7 BH: What actually happens on the call is if somebody says, I say the cost for this program is \$3300, that's the cost for the current thing that I'm running. "Does that work for you?" And then if the person says, no. "No, that's really out of range for me," then I say, "Cool, is there a number that would work better for you?" And so then we're in a conversation, right, and it's not a negotiation. It's really explicitly not a negotiation because I am not trying to... I don't wanna be in a conversation where... In a negotiation where somebody is trying to get the most for the least from me, I don't want that dynamic. And so when I say, what's a number that would be more doable for you, I'm asking people to also answer me back with what they need. I've said, "Here's what I need, it's \$3300. What do you need? Oh, is it \$1000? Oh, is it \$500? What is the number that you would actually find doable here? Let's talk about that."

1:07:18.9 BH: And so then from there, we get to sort of just have an honest, generous conversation

that's like, "Is what you need compatible with what I need?" And that to me is like the basis of healthy relationship where you're not trying to extract from me, I'm not trying to exploit you. You're not trying to manipulate me, and I am also not trying to manipulate you, we're just trying to see are our needs compatible. Is there a way for us to be in relationship with each other around this? How fucking freeing, like how fucking freeing to just be like, d"Does it work for us to do this thing in this way." It doesn't have to be that I'm right or wrong for charging the amount of money that I charge, it doesn't have to be that you should feel guilt or shame for not having that amount of money to pay me, it's just about, is what I need and what you need compatible with each other. So That's thought number one, that's like what actually happens in the call.

1:08:17.3 BH: Thought number two is how I make that possible to be able to have that conversation is that I'm engineering my pricing to be able to make sure that I guarantee that I can give away some spots for free or for less, and so when I say is \$3300, what that's... How I'm doing that, is that that means that people who are paying at the full price are... Some of their money is earmarked to fund some people who won't pay less, right. And so when somebody says, "Can I do it for half price?" I say yes, because I know that I have space for X number of people to take it at X amount of dollars based on the pricing that I've set up. It's not a totally perfect system, it means that I'm sort of making guesses about how many people I think will sign up, how many people I think will sign up at full price. Sometimes it comes up a little short, sometimes I end up a little over, but I am at least generally speaking, starting from a place of like, here's how much I think I can give away for free and still be okay for me.

1:09:18.3 BH: Here's how much I know I can give away for less and still be in an okay place. And so I earmark that when I say, "okay, my income goal for this enrollment period is X number of dollars, and I'm gonna plan to give away X amount of money in scholarships." So then somebody says, "Can I do it for this amount of money?" I'm like, let me look at my spread, you know I've... Hopefully, I've looked at my spreadsheet before I get on the sales call, but... I know here's how much I have to give away. And so sometimes that... Most of the time it works out, right. Most of the time, it works out that I'm able to say yes to whatever people ask. Okay, thought number three here, and then I will...

1:09:57.8 NA: No, I love it, I love it all.

1:10:00.8 BH: Stop talking. Thought number three is that I think part of what we get tangled up in emotionally and a lot of money mindset coaches really orient this way, I think often subconsciously, is that people only... This idea that people only value what they pay for, and that often the idea is that people only value what they pay a little bit more than what is comfortable for them to pay. And I just so strongly disagree with that, that has just not been my life experience as a poor person and as a working class person, and so I really think that from the consumer end it's a false assumption for us to make as business owners looking at our potential buyers or potential clients, that it's a false assumption to believe that people will only value your work if they pay more than what is comfortable for them to pay for it. I just think that that's not true. So if that's the ideology that you have been subconsciously running your business in I would invite you to question that. And then I think from the business owners end, I don't actually care how much money each individual person

is paying me, right. All I care about, my actual thing that I need to care about is, are my financial needs being met? And I have the agency and the power to control if my financial needs are getting met, and so I think of all the money...

1:11:27.8 BH: I think you and I have talked about this all the money that's coming in just as like one big pot, and I'm not really obsessing over who's paying me more and who's paying me less, and how I'm really trying hard to not let who's paying full price or who is on a discount or who is on a solid area scholarship, I definitely don't want that to impact the way that I'm treating my clients or the way that I'm showing up for them. And so if I think of all that money just going into the pot, and the people who pay more are paying me more, the people who have less are paying me less, and my needs are getting met, then I don't have to have any resentment when an individual person can't pay the full price.

1:12:08.5 NA: Totally. It's like the business... I was gonna say equivalent, but business example of when you were talking about the former partner that you lived with and had some shared finances where it sounds like you were paying based on percentage, it's not like if rent was \$2000 that you were each paying \$1000 for easy math that if they're making 70% more than you, then maybe they're paying 70% of the rent and you're paying 30% of the rent, it's like that principle I think, to some degree, makes a lot of sense to most people when it comes to that one-to-one interpersonal relationship and doesn't make as much sense in the business context because it's not what we have been told is how it should work, and it's been really interesting. Obviously, you have been my business coach for almost two years now, so we have had these conversations like in depth in other context, and just like the continual layers of things that have come up for me, and one of them really is what you were speaking to before about like a lack of imagination, like something in my business that I'm working on when it comes to the business and money question is for in-person events like retreats that I host that are capped at only eight people and retreats have a huge overhead cost, like the lodging, the food, 'cause mine are all inclusive.

1:13:17.5 NA: That I can't be as flexible in pricing as I can with a scalable digital offering that doesn't have the same kind of overhead, and so for me, I was always stuck on how do I have a sliding scale spot or a scholarship spot without charging everyone else so much more, and it's been interesting, even talking about this within my patreon community. I got the suggestion from someone who has been on multiple past retreats who said, "You should just open up a... Not like tip jar, but like scholarship fund, essentially, that those of us who want to throw in 25 bucks, 50 bucks, a 100 bucks, you know, who have been on retreats before, who would just like the idea of supplementing that to people that we can just do that."

1:13:54.2 NA: And it sounded so simple, but it really made me check myself of my own internalized assumptions that no one would ever do that, why would somebody ever pay money into this invisible scholarship fund that they don't know who it's going to, they don't get that altruistic boost of like, "I helped this person," that sort of like, savior mentality. And it was such a good example of like, Oh, we can just imagine new solutions, we can just make up new solutions, and obviously, we're talking about this in the context of self-employment, but I do think that it applies to so many of our relationships and so many of our situations of like, "What if I just take two steps to

the left and try something that's a little bit different from what has been tried before," that feels exciting to me.

1:14:32.6 BH: That's so exciting. And I think part of what's so beautiful about your business and the way that you've run things is that because you've been having really transparent money conversations with your community for so long, you can then just have, "oh hey, here's a new question, here's a new thought I'm having, here's a new idea or experiment that I wanna try," and people are largely game. I think that that's... I have straight... I have moved away from on purpose, offering things on a quote unquote "sliding scale" because I have not historically had success with that, but part of the reason that... Part of what I think makes a sliding scale work or makes people more inclined to wanna give into a scholarship fund is that there is some sense of cohesive community that also shares some degree of analysis about money. And if you were in a community and you have a clientele that is largely educated about these things, or at least... Educated is maybe not quite the... It's not the important thing here, but that is like thinking about these things and cares about this stuff, that then they're gonna be more willing to opt into something like a scholarship fund or paying at the higher end of a sliding scale or whatever.

1:15:43.0 NA: Yeah. Anything else on this topic that you wanna share?

1:15:47.5 BH: Nothing comes to mind off the top of my head.

1:15:50.0 NA: Okay. Tell me about a time in the past, I don't know, year or so, when you felt really excited about a money-related thing in your life, like the money and joy combo?

1:16:02.8 BH: I mean honestly, the thing that comes to mind, this is sort of boring, but was like when I paid off all my credit card debt. [chuckle]

1:16:08.5 NA: That doesn't sound boring. That sounds like, let's have a fucking party for you.

1:16:12.3 BH: It was like so amazing because literally the year before, I had been short on my rent and had had to borrow money from a friend, pay that friend back on my credit card, couldn't put the rent on my credit card, so thankfully had a friend who could float me the loan, but then actually they needed the money back pretty quick, so it was like, "Okay, I can pay them back with my... Moving the money around." And that was like 12 months before, and then within 12 months, I was like, "Oh, I'm actually gonna pay off this chunk of money." And it wasn't tens of thousands of dollars. I think it was about \$8500, but I had not had like a lump sum of \$8500 maybe ever in my life, and so then to have this money and just be like, "Oh wow, I'm just gonna pay it all off in one minute, I'm just gonna go sitting at the laptop and logging in and being like make a payment." 8442 or whatever it was, and then hit submit and just like wide-eyed and like heart thumping in your chest and yeah, and then just in some ways like how beautiful and joyful and amazing that is, and also how anti-climactic it is because it's not like you get anything when you pay off all your debt. [laughter] It's just like you went from negative to zero and it's like, "Oh, cool. I have no... Nothing, there's nothing there."

[laughter]

1:17:36.2 NA: I had that exact same experience of paying off my student loans in 2012, like I said, that's sitting off in front of the computer, it was around \$9000, it was all of the financial advice of, you shouldn't pay off your debt if you don't have an emergency fund, it was basically all of the money that I had in the world and the psychological boost, of I want this to be gone... That was absolutely the right decision for me, and I had that same thing, the heart palpitations, all of that, and then it was like, okay, the number on the screen that feels like fake money anyway, it's just gonna say zero like... So it's like a different number on my computer than it was before. Okay.

1:18:11.5 BH: Yeah, it's such a very clear illustration of how sort of fake it all is, it's just...

1:18:21.8 NA: That's how I feel whenever I use my credit card, especially with the tapping credit card, where I'm like, "How is this money? This all feel..." Yeah, anyway, Okay couple other random questions that I wanna ask. Do you have a financial goal right now?

1:18:36.0 BH: That's a good question. I mean, I think my financial goal at the moment is just to figure out what my new enough number is and to re-jigger my business model a little bit and make sure that it's still working. I think also one of my creative goals right now is to get back into a writing practice, and that doesn't necessarily seem like a financial goal, but it actually is because part of how I will get into a writing practice again, is to reconfigure the way that I'm working, so I'm interested in figuring out both what does my new cost of living have to do with how much money I need to make, and then also what does it look like to be making enough money that I can take a chunk of time off so that I can actually just focus on writing. I guess I also have, I guess this is a business goal/ financial goal, but...

1:19:35.2 BH: I taught a marketing class last year, marketing for weirdos that I really loved, and I made way more money from it than I thought I would and I think it has real potential to become scalable in a way that nothing else that I've ever done before does, and I'm interested in figuring out what that looks like for my business, what does it look like to have something that I could offer in an evergreen kind of way, what does it look like to have something that yeah, truly could have an infinite number of people sign up for it and pay for it, and that feels like a really interesting question for me, and it also feels really entangled in the question of how much money do I need to be making now and what does that look like to support a writing practice more long term, so...

1:20:21.5 NA: I love that. Yeah, I like the tie-in that you made between the writing practice might not seem like a money goal, but because you require time, that's time that you're not gonna be exchanging hours for dollars. Okay, how does that work? Yeah, I figured... It just popped into my head when you said that you need to re-figure out the enough number, which I'm also doing, I'm like, you and I could very much co-lead like a co-working session or... I'm sure there are people listening who also wanna go through this, so just gonna put that out there to you.

1:20:47.8 BH: Great, let's start.

1:20:48.6 NA: Last thing that I wanna ask, I don't even know if this is the right phrasing, but how much do you think we should be talking about money and how? And with who? How do you think about... It's a little meta, but like money conversations in your life.

1:21:02.2 BH: I don't know if it's actually a class-based thing, but my intuition about this is that people who grow up with not a lot of money are more comfortable talking about money than people who grow up with enough money or a lot of money. All of my friends who are weird about money, the weird about money conversations are people who have more than enough and whose families have more than enough. And I think that there's really something... The word that I wanna use is nefarious about that, but I don't want that to come across as judgmental of individual people. I don't think it's bad. I don't think it's people's individual fault that they have a hesitation or a discomfort about talking about money, especially if you have a lot of it, but I think it's really worth interrogating if you have a lot of money to look at why it feels so hard to talk about that in a casual way.

1:22:00.0 BH: I would love it if I just knew how much all my friends salaries were, if they work on salary, I would love it if we talked more about how much your rent was or how much your house cost, or where that money came from or how much your spouse makes? Or whatever, how much does daycare cost, so many things that are just... That sort of get silenced or invisibilized, I think... I always ask the question of, who does it benefit for me to think this way? Who does it benefit for us to not talk about money, not poor people, [chuckle] not poor people. It only benefits people with a lot of money, for us to be in a culture where we can't talk about it, and so... Yeah, I think normalize talking about it. Normalize, having those conversations and yeah. I love talking about this stuff, and I think sometimes I make people... I make people uncomfortable because I wanna just be like, "How much is your rent?" And people are like, "Oh God, I don't know you." [chuckle] I'm like, "No, no, I'm just, I'm curious."

1:23:05.4 NA: Yeah, yeah, same thing. I had a recent, a friend that bought a house, and that was my question was, "Oh, how much was the house," and he was, "Way too much," but wouldn't give an actual number, which is fine, 'cause there's also kind of the subset question of what do we actually owe each other when it comes to financial transparency, which I certainly don't have an answer for, but I thought that that was interest, that it just... It sparked in my head as interesting 'cause that's not something that I would have got to withhold.

1:23:33.5 BH: Yeah, I mean I think one of the things that I see a lot with my business clients is like that we all tend to orient... We all tend to think that our own sense of expensive or cheap is the same as everyone else's, and I think that's because we don't have any objective benchmarks to base that on, so it's like, oh, I think X amount of dollars a month in rent would be really expensive because it would be really expensive for me, but somebody else who makes \$300,000 a year finds that amount totally doable and infact maybe very affordable, but I don't know that that's affordable for them, because I don't know that that's how much money they're making and so it's all this sort of emotional guesswork that's happening instead of financial facts and figures...

1:24:19.6 NA: And also context.

1:24:20.9 BH: Totally.

1:24:21.7 NA: Like that we don't have the context, like I think about another friend who's mortgage payment per month is the amount of my take-home salary, and we are very open about money, so he and I have talked about that. So the total amount of money after taxes that is going into my bank account, from my business bank account is the amount that he is spending on his mortgage, and to me that I'm the mind-blown emoji that breaks my brain, but also he's got multiple kids and they're in daycare, and he lives in a much more expensive city and there's just... It's just so different, and so it's... On one hand, it's like I want the transparency, I appreciate that that's something that he shared. But without the context, I feel like that could easily be like, "oh gosh, what's wrong with me that I'm not making enough money," that it can very easily turn into some kind of competitive thing or some kind of self-worth thing, but it doesn't have to be.

1:25:09.0 BH: Yeah, or on the flip side, what's wrong with him? That he thinks he needs such a nice, fancy, whatever, whatever, what's wrong with him that he's so greedy, like whatever the kind of... We would either internalize the judgment or externalize the judgment and... Yeah, I think so much of the figuring out your enough number, part of what that frees up for me too, is that I get to figure out what's enough for me, and it's not really my business, what's enough for anyone else. If you've done the calculation, and this is the place that you've arrived at like, okay, it's not really my... It's not really my business to weigh in on anybody else's individual calculations, unless they've hired me and ask me to do that.

1:25:50.0 NA: Right, right. Well, and it does help me keep my eyes on my own paper, because when you are defining what enough is or what success is, or any of these different metrics that if we don't do this work for ourselves, there are normative mainstream answers. And I think doing it for myself is what helps me to at least start to unpack some of the more sticky, like the guilt or the shame, or whatever the unlearning that I have to do personally because of my own specific money story and upbringing, and we all have that kind of stuff.

1:26:22.3 BH: Totally, and I think the other thing that that shows up as in small business life is I could never charge that because nobody could afford it, because I couldn't afford it, I think nobody else could afford it, so I can't charge \$500 for this class. Who could pay that? It's like, it turns out lots of people have \$500 that they wanna spend on a business class. Holy shit. Who knew?

1:26:40.8 NA: Yeah and it's also, I feel like there's even more nuance, another layer underneath that, because there are so many things that the question for me isn't, can I afford this because technically, is the money available that I could do that? Yes, but is spending \$500 on this class, is that worth the same thing of what \$500 would get me in terms of number of days hiking on trail? There's also that. In terms of the money and joy thing, like could I afford it versus is that the way that I wanna prioritize my spending. It's almost like another layer of that self-inquiry work.

1:27:13.8 BH: Yes, and I think so many people are not actually making any of those choices based on real numbers and are just making it based on like, well, this is how we feel in this moment, and

I'll say that the feelings do matter. I'm not an advocate for not feeling your feelings about money, but I think feeling the feelings only about money without any of those sort of facts and financials to back it up, is just like... It's the road to ruin right. It's the road to a lot of angst that's not necessary, and being able to anchor our feelings in some reality, can really give just yeah, just a lot of freedom and a lot of joy. That's not possible otherwise.

1:27:52.5 NA: I love that. I think that's a great place for us to wrap up, if you could leave people with one affirmation of sorts based on our conversation, what would it be, or I guess, what is your wish for everyone listening?

1:28:05.0 BH: We don't have to play by capitalism's rules, we can make our own systems inside of the system, it's possible for us to envision and imagine and enact micro-versions of a better way of relating to ourselves and our money and each other and the world right now. That's possible for us. We're not trapped here, we're not stuck here, there are lots of things that are out of our control and still we have so much agency, and I wish that we could all see that and practice it more.

1:28:37.5 NA: Yeah, and I love the reminder of the word you said, micro, that sometimes it's easy to feel like, "Well, I can't single-handedly take down capitalism, so... Oh, well," but to remember that in our person-to-person relationships whether that's in our business or in our lives that we can create, like you said, these other ways of doing things even in the micro.

1:28:58.2 BH: Yeah.

1:29:00.0 NA: What is the best place for people to say hi to you? Do you have a favorite way to connect with new folks, if they're like, "Oh my God, I'm obsessed with everything you said, what's next?"

1:29:08.5 BH: Yeah the place that I'm most around is Instagram, I'm on Instagram @bearhebert with a little underscore at the end, I'm actually not on Instagram all that much. I feel real hot and cold with my relationship to that place, so if you DM I don't write you back for three weeks, it's not because I'm ignoring you, it's because I've deleted the app from my phone, but I would love for people to reach out to me there, if they want to. And yeah, folks can also find more information about me and my work and all the things that I offer on my website bearcoaches.com.

1:29:40.2 NA: I will put links to those things in the show notes. Thank you so much.

1:29:43.5 BH: Thank you so much for having me. It's always a pleasure.

[music]

1:29:55.5 NA: Thanks so much for listening to this episode of the Pop-Up Pod. There are a few awesome and super helpful ways that you can support our show if you've got a few minutes to do that, five-star ratings on Apple Podcasts are so sincerely appreciated, it helps new listeners to see how much other people love the show, writing a one-to two-sentence review to go along with your

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