

Nomadic Pursuits: Finding Happiness on the Road
Less Traveled

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We help the tiny house community
use their lower housing costs to
build financial independence.

With Laura Lynch



Full Episode Transcript

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Laura Lynch

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Are you ready to break free from a conventional life and achieve financial independence through your version of tiny living, but you're feeling stuck trying to figure out the money part? Does the pressure to conform to societal norms make it even more difficult to embrace an unconventional lifestyle?

Well, you're in the right place.

I'm Laura Lynch, host of the Less House More Moola Podcast, where every Thursday, I'll bring you captivating interviews with individuals who have successfully made the transition to tiny living. They defied expectations and are thriving in their unique lives.

We'll also dive deep into industry resources to address common financial concerns on your tiny journey. Together, we'll explore the emotional and practical aspects of pursuing an alternative lifestyle. I'll describe a clear framework for project planning and cash flow management. Our goal is to intentionally build financial security and make a positive impact through our alternative American dream.

So, gear up for an exciting and empowering journey to create a life that truly resonates with you. Let's dive into today's episode and take the first steps towards financial independence and purpose through tiny living.

Laura Lynch: Hey there, Laura here. Before we get into today's episode with Andy and Ayana about their life in a bus, I wanted to, first of all, thank you for following this podcast and ask you to share it with someone who might find it interesting.

And for this conversation, I wanted to just ask your patience because we did have some connectivity issues and some interruptions, so you might hear a glitch or two along the way,

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and I want to make sure that you know that this conversation is super valuable.

And just thank you for your patience with any audio quality challenges we have.

Andy and Ayana, thank you so much for being here on Less House More Moola. I am super thrilled to share you with my audience. People may have already heard you. It seems like you all have gotten to really hit the social media track. I saw that you were on Tiny House Expedition, which is awesome. So, good publicity there.

So, you and I actually connected through Brendan and Carson who were my first interview. So, that was awesome. That was a cold Instagram DM to them. So, now, it seems like I get to talk to people who get referred, so it's really cool.

So, your story is super amazing, and you wrote about it and got it published in Huffington Post. And so, I love that, that the world got to hear your story in that big media piece.

So, Andy, in that article, you talked about how you were forced off the American dream path, and I do a lot of, I guess, beating up on the American dream and some of the things that I write about.

Your story is about the unaffordability of homes in Boulder, Colorado. So, would you share with us that story?

Andy: Sure, yeah. So, Boulder, Colorado is where Ayana grew up and it was my home for about a decade before the bus. So, I worked as a wildland firefighter all through my twenties and saved up a lot of money during that time.

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And then when I was nearing 30, I decided it was time for a career change and maybe time to settle down a little bit more since working wildland fire, it's like six months on the road every year.

There's not a whole lot of reason to have a super stable home base, but I wanted to settle down and was looking at properties in Boulder, Colorado, which granted, is one of the most expensive home markets in the country. It's a really tough place.

But even looking at houses, a couple towns over, I was so stretched, the stretch to the point that I was looking at taking all of my savings, combining them with all of my friend's savings and still barely affording a house that was in not very good shape.

We were going to do it, we were pretty committed at the time and actually, went so far as to go under contract with one particular house, but they had a sagging floor and the owners wouldn't let us have that assessed. So, we backed out of that deal because it just seemed a little skippy.

Laura Lynch: Yes. So, you said in your article that you aren't sure that if even you were able to have bought the house that you would've been happy. And so, can you share with us kind of looking back what you've learned about happiness in your time on the bus?

Andy: Yeah, so like I was saying, I would've been every penny that I had in savings going into that house, which would've meant taking away pretty much my whole safety net and immediately, needing to get a new job and probably going back to the field that I was trying to leave just because that was a reliable way for me to make a lot of money.

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And so, when the house fell through in some ways, the silver lining was that I had all these savings and if I couldn't afford a house, that meant investing that in myself and the other things in life that I wanted to accomplish.

And so, I really shifted my perspective from trying to build wealth in a very traditional way to trying to pursue a path that aligned more my goals from childhood. And I think that there's a lot more happiness in pursuing the things that are important to us rather than focusing on material wealth and that sort of comfort.

Laura Lynch: Sure. So, Ayana, what have you learned in your time on the bus about what makes you happy. And tell us a little bit about where you came from and your story before you started bus life.

Ayana: Yeah, so as Andy said, I grew up in Boulder through high school. After high school I took a gap here and traveled internationally for a long time. And so, this idea of sort of unconventional living or maybe making choices that most folks weren't making was already baked into a certain degree to the way that I was choosing to live.

And at the same time, after a year of travel, I still felt that very traditional pull back to I should get an education, I need a bachelor's degree, like a little bit of the existential, what am I doing with my life?

And so, that pulled me back into the traditional four-year college experience in Boulder as well. And I didn't like it, it wasn't for me, but I did it and I checked the box.

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And after that, I think going through the process and realizing how unhappy I was throughout that experience or how much it felt like a should and not a want, I decided, “Okay, I'm not getting a nine to five, I'm not going to work in a lab. I'm not doing anything my degree set me up for, instead I'm going to go play with kids all day and be a nanny.”

And it was wonderful, and that really in the same way that Andy working fire allowed him to kind of save money and then decide, “Okay, I'm going to invest this in myself,” nannying for me was that exact same thing. It was saving up the money to then put into the bus and once Andy and I met, then hitting the road.

And so, choosing to do things that are a little bit offbeat or to the beat of our own drums, I think is fairly baked in for both of us. But as you enter adulthood, I think the decision has to be more and more of a conscious effort of not kind of flowing into that track and not getting sort of stuck. And so, bus life has taught me all kinds of things.

At first, like neither one of us were working full-time when we got on the bus. And so, it was a lot about what do I want to do? What pursuits am I interested in putting my time, energy, effort, and attention on ... that in and of itself is just a whole exploration.

And yeah, the bus has taught me just how worthwhile and challenging and rewarding, but ultimately, worthwhile. It's a worthwhile pursuit.

Laura Lynch: I think it's really interesting that we have this path that we're all sort of prescribed, and it doesn't really allow us to explore and figure out whether it's in good alignment and then

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kind of once you're on that path, it's pretty hard to get off. I would say the further down the line you get, the harder it is to sort of jump off that track and do something different.

And especially when you're young and picking your college degree, it's pretty hard to imagine exactly what is fulfilling to you and what's meaningful work to you, because you don't even really know work at that point.

So, it's good that I think that that taking some time to figure that out is a worthy goal and definitely helps you get out of that existential crisis that might hit you in middle age at an earlier time in your life.

So, you all have both taken that time to explore and you got back to work, and it seems that you're kind of running a lot of entrepreneurial endeavors there. So, it sounds that you all had some good opportunity to sort of explore what meaningfulness meant for you.

And in your article, you mentioned time and mental freedom. So, it sounds that that has become a really key priority for you. So, can you share with us how you came to prioritize time and mental freedom?

Andy: Yeah. So, one of the nice things about working in wildland fire was that I worked really hard for six months every year, and then the other six months I kind of just got to do whatever I wanted.

And I think that sort of unstructured, unemployment can be really difficult, and I think a lot of people first experience that with COVID lockdowns where they just suddenly had nothing to do and it can be really depressing.

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But I think once you sort of learn to master that time and turn it toward the things that really matter to you, it's really hard, as you were saying a little while ago, to go back to working for somebody else and putting your mental energy into a project that's not yours.

So, living in the bus, obviously, we have a lot of time that we have to figure out how to use and figuring out how to use that productively and really focus it in on the stuff that's important to us is a challenge, but has been really rewarding and definitely would be difficult to return now to not having so much time and mental freedom for the projects that really matter.

Laura Lynch: I talk about this in terms of autonomy, kind of like that's the ultimate goal, even though it seems like that, at least in my financial planning sphere, everybody's trying to plan for that retirement date that day that you stop working. But I don't think any of us as humans really like to stop being productive and contributing and creating mastery and being creative.

And so, I think what it comes down to is we just want the freedom to choose and to choose what time is spent how. And so, it's really more about exactly what you talked about, time and mental freedom than it is about, "Let me work for 40 years and then I'll resign and then I'll be happy."

And that just doesn't work, because we are happy when we're creating and when we're contributing and that sort of thing. So, I think that that's a great revelation that we should all have a little bit earlier in our lives.

But here you are, you're working multiple jobs, both of you. So, tell me how you're setting boundaries or creating rules around that time and mental freedom based on the fact that you are

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taking on so many challenges with so many different sort of business segments.

Ayana: So, more recently both of us have taken part-time work for companies. So, Andy's doing recipe development for Food Republic, I'm doing some part-time work for Tiny Home Tours.

And so, that's added an element of external structure still with so much freedom that I think for both of us, it feels kind of a welcome flexible structure that we can work in.

In terms of our own businesses, certainly, for me, between the jewelry and the dream work, and then the social media side of bus life and whether you're doing ads for companies on social media or just kind of keeping your following updated on where you are and what you're doing, it has been so hard to create structure that feels good and at the same time, feels supportive for all of those pieces.

It feels kind of like spinning plates, like when you're spending time on one, then the other one over here is getting very wobbly.

And for a while, it was just kind of trying to say, "Okay, well, I'm going to do jewelry these days a week and I'm going to post on Instagram these days a week, and I'm going to work on dream work and following up with folks this day of the week," and it just didn't work.

I found it to be very ... I was almost rebelling against myself and the structure that I've created. And so, I think now, at least for me, it's much more fluid of really asking myself at the beginning of a day, like, "What am I most excited about doing today? How do I really want to spend my time today?"

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And whatever that little nudge is, really trusting that and following that because then if the nudge is for jewelry, it doesn't feel like work, then all of a sudden, I'm just creating and things are going way better than if I'm doing it on a day when I'm already angry about it before I start.

And so, I think it's been a process of real internal trust for me. Like all of these things will get done, I will check all of the boxes, but trusting that what I'm drawn to today might be different than what I'm drawn to tomorrow.

And following those sort of internal soul nudges that lead to increased productivity, quality of product, and that that piece of your soul that then is palpable for people in your work.

Laura Lynch: So, do you feel like when you do that, when you follow your internal nudges and you do kind of what is calling to you that day — do you feel like the serendipity of the results or the energy is attracting like that you get better results from if you're focused on any one particular Instagram post or topic or whether you're working on the podcast or the jewelry — do you feel like the results are impacted by you just going with what the universe is telling you to do?

Ayana: I definitely do. I think that people can really feel the energy behind what you're putting out in the world, and if it's excitement and authenticity, it really comes through.

And I think conversely, they can feel if you're dragging your feet about it or it feels like one of those like, “Oh, I really should like ...” those shoulds, “I should be doing this and I should be saying this.” And I think it is palpable.

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It's hard to tell whether the results actually change, but it certainly always feels better for me. So, I can imagine that it would feel better for other folks too.

Laura Lynch: It's an interesting concept to imagine a world where people, instead of having to punch a clock and do the same repetitive task all the time, had a variety of things that they could work on and could pick their thing that they felt most called to on that day.

And if just generally people were doing work that they were passionate about and that they felt called to do and motivated to do, like what it would look like in the world today — that's kind of a little side imagination to point there.

So, we would of course, be remiss of not kind of talking about recipes and how the idea of that book, that cookbook came about and how did you go from wildland firefighting to recipe development.

Andy: That is kind of a strange turn of directions, but I always wanted to write when I was a kid and I loved cooking from a very young age. As soon as I could reach the stove top, I was learning to cook, it was just really important in my family.

And so, when I left my career and went wildland fire, I started blogging immediately. Originally, it was more focused on sort of foraging wild foods, but then when we moved into the bus, moving as much as we do, it became clear that that was going to be difficult on the road.

Not a lot of space to put out jars full of syrups and fermenting pinecones and things like that. So, instead, I focused more on what you can do in a tiny kitchen on a two-burner stove. And

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so, I started blogging about it, just sort of finding recipes that worked well, cuisines that worked well.

And after a year and a half or so of that, and I had quite a log of recipes and it seemed like maybe it was time to fill it out with some photos and some stories, and make the book happen.

So, I raised the money on Kickstarter for the first 3000 copies to be printed and yeah, we're a little over a year out from publication and about 1400 books have sold now, it's been really just an incredible ride.

Laura Lynch: That's amazing. So, are you still taking orders or is the book in your hands ready to ship?

Andy: Oh yeah, it's ready to ship. It's available on Amazon and on my website, the buslifekitchen.com.

Laura Lynch: That's awesome. So, what was it like to hold that book in your hand for the first time?

Andy: Oh, it was pretty incredible. It was something I dreamed about since I was a little kid.

Laura Lynch: Awesome. So, share with people who haven't had the opportunity, what it is like to make money doing things that you love as opposed to things that you should be doing or following like a career path that you're just doing because you got to do it?

Andy: I would say that in general, it is a lot harder, takes a lot more effort. I probably work more than I've ever worked in any job, but it's so much easier to do that work and it's so rewarding to be in a place where I really created a career for myself, and I wake up in the morning and I spend time thinking about the

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stuff that I want to think about. I spend time working on the projects that excite me.

It's pretty wild to find yourself in that place after years of working for other people.

Ayana: I think it's also very vulnerable. Both of us felt this when we — it was about a year ago that we pulled up to a bus life event and put out our table with the cookbooks and my jewelry, and I remember thinking in my body, like, “Is anybody going to buy this junk? Is this really worth your money?”

And kind of slowly, obviously you grow in your craft and so that helps and you grow in your confidence. But I think for you also with the book, it's like, I spent so much time on this and now it's here in my hand, and you put it out in the world and you have no idea what the reception is going to be.

It's a very kind of nerve-wracking and vulnerable experience to share something that you've created and are passionate about with the world.

Laura Lynch: Yeah. There's a really beautiful book called *The Practice* by ... I'm blanking on his name, I'll have to put it in the show notes, that talks about your job as a creative is to ship the work, and you just make, and you ship the work. And you're not responsible for the outcome.

Your job is to show up and do the work and ship the work. And if you can just stay focused on making the work and shipping the work, then the results will be what they'll be.

But it is really hard to stay committed and especially as you're building momentum to keep doing the thing over and over again until you have that following that you need.

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So, I really want to come back to the American dream where we started our conversation, and kind of reiterate what you said in the article, Andy, about how that your generation doesn't have access to the American dream and is seeking freedom.

And so, I want to talk a little bit more, and of course, we can't always speak for our entire generation, but what you are seeing with people your age and what do you hope for, for folks in the millennial generation?

Andy: So, we definitely see a particular section of this generation a lot in the nomad community.

In general, I think that a lot of our generation does feel like — idea that we were raised on of the good job, the pension, the retirement, the house, the family, all of that is be like, pick one or two, now you can't have all the things that were promised.

You can have a house but maybe not going to have a family, that sort of thing. But at the same time, I think that we're doing a really good job of responding in creative ways, and doing things like spending more of our time and money on having experiences, and focusing on building the careers that are important to us instead of raising a family first and taking whatever job you have to and suffering through that for sake of the family and the house. Definitely a lot more creativity in how we're spending our time.

Laura Lynch: I think we all adapt. We have to adapt to the world that we live in and sometimes, adaptations are a way that we can take a step forward and move into a different capability and version of ourselves. Do you have anything you wanted to add, Ayana?

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Ayana: Not a ton. I mean, I think really with the pandemic and remote work, I think that it's just opening up, it's allowing for all of the creativity that we yearned for to come through even faster.

There are so many people on the road that have full-time remote jobs and for most of them, that doesn't look like sitting in their bus for 40 hours a week. That means having our office outside in a forest or spending your lunch break floating down the river and bend.

And so, even in what looks like the most similar to the traditional model that we were sort of sold, there is still this breaking out of that and choosing leisure and time freedom over being stuck in a box for 40 hours a week, and commuting both ways and all of that.

I think with the internet and how much hybrid work and remote work there is, it's giving us the opportunity and also, the incentive to keep kind of breaking free for a cliché, lack of a better term, the cliché.

Laura Lynch: I'm good with that. I like the breaking free idea. So, looking back, how have your perspectives on that thing that you were working for before, you're trying to focus on doing the thing that you thought you should, and now that you've had all this nomadic time, how have your perspectives on everything shifted?

Ayana: So, much so. I think now I feel like the thing that I should be doing is much more intimately linked to passion and purpose. It's sort of been replaced in that way. Like no, the thing that I should be doing is the thing that I'm excited about and driven to do, and here to do on more of a soul level and less of a material level.

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I think that goes for pretty much every aspect of living right now for me, at least.

Andy: I think that there was a lot of focus before on things that directly related to financial security and taking the turn that we have is definitely involved accepting a lot of financial insecurity in pursuit of something different and greater.

But yeah, it's been really meaningful and hopefully, at some point, we'll reach that nice spot of financial security.

Laura Lynch: Yes. Well, you're definitely sowing the seeds for businesses that can create that for you in the future.

So, when you, both and I talked a couple of weeks ago, we talked about the community and the community support and we haven't talked about that so much this time, but I kind of wanted to bring that in and asking you if it's not a house in Boulder with a sagging floor, what do you see as your most valuable assets now?

Andy: I mean, the community, the nomadic community has been just such a gift to us. We've been on the road for close to three years now, but we didn't really come to know the community so much until about a year ago when we went to our first meetup.

But since then, just meeting all of these wonderful, generous people and spending time, sharing meals, talking, camping together, it's been so remarkable and the amount of support that everybody gives to each other both in terms of supporting creative endeavors and when your bus breaks down, there's somebody who knows how to help you.

We've had some really wonderful help from former diesel mechanics. There's just such an interconnected web of support

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in this very legitimate community that's been a huge asset to us.

Ayana: Support and also opportunity. Like every connection that we make on the road, if you are willing to put out there what you need and what you're looking for, there is somebody who — like the puzzle pieces just fit perfectly sometimes.

And that's been a really unique experience, I think to living on the road, where all of a sudden, you're mentioning like, “Hey, I would like a photographer or a videographer to do this.” And then someone's like, “Well, I know a guy who's parked five miles down the road and he's actually looking for a project to work on.”

And so, there is this way, I think that with so many people focused on what they love on their passions on following this kind of untraditional path, there's this sort of magic that happens in the connections that we create and the opportunities that we co-create with each other.

And then that somehow leads to like more financial abundance, more freedom of time than we could ever have created on our own. And so, it's this cool network of like-minded people doing really amazing things that all of a sudden, you get to tap into just because you live in an old school bus now. Just so cool.

Laura Lynch: I wish that I could take exactly what you all just said and go by the biggest megaphone and hope for my generation, for your generation, for Gen Z, that this could be leading the way for people to reengage with others, and to find the value of community.

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Because the American Dream and a single-family home has been isolating and it has been keeping us apart from each other, and there is so much abundance and so much wealth to be found through relationship.

And so, if there could be a turning point back to that relationship and sharing of resources instead of me pulling up to the goodwill drop off and seeing the entirety of the home goods store pouring into the donation doors — like if we could just share amongst each other, then we wouldn't need so much individual wealth.

Ayana: And it's so much easier. It is so hard to do it on your own. It is so hard to create the life that feels good and that you want on your own or even with one other person.

But oh my goodness, all of a sudden, when you have six people, like right now we're parked up with two other buses that we're friends with, and we pulled in it, it just feels like home. And all of a sudden, you come out and they're cocktails for happy hour and someone set out the rug and all of a sudden, the quality of life just got so much better and you didn't even have to do anything.

Laura Lynch: I love that. Well, thank you both for sharing your story and perspective, so valuable. Before we go, would you both share where you would like people to track you down or follow you?

Andy: Yeah, you can find me on Instagram. That's probably where I'm most active at the Buslife Kitchen and the buslifekitchen.com is my website.

Ayana: And if you're on Instagram and you go to Let's Live Everywhere, that's kind of our homepage as a couple that

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travels on a bus. All of the projects are linked there; the jewelry, the dream work, you can find all of the accounts on there, and we'd love for you to follow along.

Laura Lynch: Wonderful. Thank you again for being here.

Ayana: Thank you so much for having us. It's been great.

Well, that's it for today's episode of Less House More Moola. To access valuable financial tips and resources tailored to your tiny living journey, join our exclusive community at thetinyhouseadviser.com.

Here, you'll find a supportive network of like-minded individuals committed to helping each other navigate the challenges and celebrate the victories of embracing a minimalist lifestyle.

So, don't miss out on the opportunity to be part of this empowering tribe. Be sure to tune in next Thursday for another insightful episode of Less House More Moola, where we'll continue to explore practical solutions and inspiring stories to help you create the life you've always dreamed of.

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