

**A Single Dad's Journey to Parenthood and Advocacy
in the Tiny House Community**

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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

With Your Host

Laura Lynch

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A Single Dad's Journey to Parenthood and Advocacy in the Tiny House Community

It takes a brave and independent mindset to go tiny. If you are trying to figure out your tiny pivot, this podcast is here to inspire and connect you with the other unconventional, gritty, inspirational people within this community.

I'm Laura Lynch, your tiny house friend and host. On this show, we are always going to come back to money because, as a financial planner, this is the question I hear the most: How do I make this work for me financially?

Well, that's my jam. So jump in, let's go. New episodes drop every Thursday.

Laura Lynch: Well, Kevin Martin, thank you so much for joining me on Less House More Moola. I'm always so amazed by how people show up on my podcast. You in particular, it's a great story.

In New Mexico, in my tiny house, calling out to New Mexico to try to find communities where I might go and visit some people. And the community wasn't anymore, but somebody gave me your phone ... or no, somebody gave you my phone number and we connected.

And so, just strangers wandering around the tiny living space, and here we are meeting up on Zoom. So, awesome, thank you so much for joining me.

Kevin Martin: Thanks for having me.

Laura Lynch: You are in the Durango area, one of our sort of favorite areas, but super high costs there. So, we are going to kind of dive into that a little bit, but would you start off by introducing yourself and how you came to tiny living?

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Kevin Martin: So, my name's Kevin Martin, like you said, I live in southern Colorado in a county called La Plata County within the city of Durango. Which was, I should say a little stop away from the rest of the world, but has recently become quite popular and has been blowing up over the past several years.

So, I am, let's see ... it's kind of a long story, but to sum it all up, started in 2016, 2017 looking into tiny homes. Did a lot of research, why would we want to do this? What should we do? How do we want to build it? All sorts of things.

I was watching all the shows and all the materials online, seeing everybody kind of post things, going to tiny home shows in the Pacific Northwest and really came down to really making the decision to go in 2018. So, the house was completed in 2018.

Built RVIA certified, built to be towed. So, everything was really kind of designed and built to maximize the ability to tow it with a pretty big truck, and it was great. Lived on the road, traveling the western U.S. for about three years, and then settled into Durango, back into Durango. Because this place is amazing and had a lot of friends here from college and so yeah, here we are.

Ended up getting lucky — and not necessarily lucky, but we ended up getting a spot in Island Cove, which is directly in town and one of the many tiny home communities in this area.

And I say lucky because it was a bit of luck, but kind of made our own luck, if you will, because we helped do a lot of things to help get tinies legalized here.

Laura Lynch: Awesome. And that's definitely the expertise that I want to kind of hone in on today. Because all of us are navigating

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different rules in different places and understanding how to advocate for yourself is really important for those folks that are still looking to go this direction.

So, when you kind of flash back to 2017, 2018, what are some things that you did not know back then that you know now that you think are really important?

Kevin Martin: I know myself a lot better, so I think that's one big thing. I'd say the growth, not just with tiny, but in life in general has been tremendous over the last several years. And like everybody, we've gone through a lot over the last few.

But I think when it comes down to what do I know now that I didn't know then, I mean, did a ton of research, and talked to a lot of people and a lot. So, I felt very confident with what decisions we were making, where we were going, how we were building, what we're choosing. And it's been phenomenal.

Like I think we knew there was going to be challenges with parking it, we knew ... so we tried to mitigate some of those risks doing RVIA certified. We knew we wanted to travel, so we wanted to build it light and maneuverable, but still contain everything we wanted.

And so, yeah, I think the biggest thing for me was after getting in, being in it for a little while, you realize that you're going to end up ... I guess for myself, I ended up becoming way more knowledgeable about things I didn't plan on being knowledgeable about.

For building codes to zoning, to parking, to power, things that you just wouldn't necessarily need to. How are we getting our

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water? Where is it running from? Are we flush, non-flush? Gray, black water?

And so, I think those things were really interesting to kind of grow into because when we left Seattle and started traveling out of Oregon, I think the biggest challenge was you couldn't park anywhere.

I mean, it was very early and granted, there was a few people who were doing this a few years prior, obviously, and they were paving the way, but it was very difficult to find parking spots. And it was also difficult to find RV and other campsites that would accept tinies.

So, there was a lot of phone calls on the way to the next place, a lot of research in finding the right places we could go and park it. And the other piece was also like, "Hey, what are we going to do about where we park it? Can we park it long-term or are we going to get in trouble?"

And having a little bit of a nervousness about, this is not a small, tiny house. It's definitely a large footprint and when you see it, you're definitely ... you can't hide it at all. So, those are some of the challenges.

So, I think overall, it was the zoning and then a lot of things about just living off ... not fully off grid, because this house isn't fully off grid capable. We have brought it off grid, but really understanding the details.

Laura Lynch: I think that's the case with anything we undertake in life, whether it's a new job or starting a business or going tiny. There's so much you don't know at the beginning, and you just

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have to have that confidence of, "I figured stuff out before, so I can probably figure this out."

Kevin Martin: Absolutely. No stranger to just jumping into something and letting the experience unfold and kind of go through it. And I think that's partly ... when you make a decision to go tiny, that's part of the experience.

I mean, this is a shift in lifestyle, this is a shift in the way you show up and immediately, you're into this community. And at that point, the community was smaller but growing very quickly.

Now it's grown exponentially, and you kind of find yourself in places you didn't expect to, and you realize that you need to take on certain roles in order to safeguard your future and your life basically.

Laura Lynch: Awesome. So, I know you've shifted kind of your goal over time, and you just referenced that as part of the journey. What was your original goal and how did that change over time for you?

Kevin Martin: Ironically, I owned two houses prior to going tiny. And ironically, they were actually shrinking, each home we bought was shrinking. And I was like, "Okay, next, tiny house."

I think there was a lot of conversation, the idea of the experience, the idea of a lifestyle change, the idea of purging stuff that wasn't necessary, and really kind of living a simpler, more efficient life. And then the travel piece of this was the original goal and kind of what's next.

I mean, there was a point where I stopped working at Amazon and it was kind of a ... for the past few years it's been a very, "What's my purpose? What do I want to do?" And then COVID

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hit. And so, one thing you just kind of leaving into all these things.

And so, the experience piece, check; getting to see cool places, check. And on the way, there are certain challenges you face and then there's certain — life is always rolling along and there's always something coming forward.

So, I think the opportunity to settle the house down, to kind of find a place, Durango ended up being that place again, and it's been awesome. Want to raise the kids in a town like this, of good network here, and love being in Colorado and outdoors.

Obviously, with the challenge with that, prior, when we first got here, the housing market wasn't as bad, and then it exploded over COVID due to a lot of people moving, second homes. And our median home price is about 899,000.

And just to give perspective, Durango's a town of 19,000, we're not a city. So, I mean, you say city of Durango, but really, if you think about a city coming from Seattle, Denver, some of these other cities, it's not really that big of a city.

So, we don't have a lot of high paying jobs. A lot of our jobs are based on the tourism industry, and it poses a real big challenge in this area, like many other cities in Colorado and towns in Colorado. And so, tiny has really opened the door for myself and many others to be able to live in this area.

Laura Lynch: And so, why did kind of settling in one place become ... what about that became important to you?

Kevin Martin: Well, I think two main reasons, well, there's three really. I mean, things were moving along, and we were able to find a place in a nice area that we could park the tiny and have it.

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There's a peace to having your home parked full-time, it's simpler. Yet, no doubt, the traveling was awesome, but it's costly, and the reality of finding a place, and that was always the goal. Like where do we go? Where do we want to find a place?

And so, when this was decided to come back to Durango, laying a lot of foundational groundwork to be able to figure out what we're going to do with the tiny, and luckily, things progress very quickly here because of how innovative and how forward thinking and acting this area has been.

Not only the state, but the county as well as the city in opening full-time parking within city limits. And so, that was a big determinant factor that in and of itself to be able to get into a community, start really figuring out what's next in Durango and beyond, and that was the biggest opportunity.

And then obviously, life happens. In that time, we were going through a divorce and really the house became a necessity to get through a lot of it for just lower costs and all the different things that were happening. Plus, the boys love the home, and we love the town.

Laura Lynch: So, you mentioned your kids. So, share with us what you view as some of the pros and cons of raising two kids in a tiny house.

Kevin Martin: Well, I certainly have less kids than some in tiny homes. So, I have 8-year-old twin boys, and they've been in the tiny home since they could remember.

So, a lot of people can be like, "How do you do this? How do you raise kids in a tiny home?" And it's just like, "Well, this is

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what they know.” So, there's different ways that you kind of have to manage it.

Deep winters, February into January, that's very challenging, especially Christmas break because they don't want to be outside as much. In the summer, spring, fall, they're outside more than they're inside.

We have a great community here, amazing space, and a lot of cool things happening right around us within a mile or two. So, there's never really anything ... they're inside for a bit. They're reading, they're playing their games or playing in the space.

So, yeah, for me, there hasn't been any downside to raising my kids in a tiny house. A lot of it is other people's kind of projection or thoughts on it. Like, “Oh my gosh, how do you do it?”

Well, when that's all they've known, it really does work for them. And I think part of the effort as well was building to their needs and evolving with that as well, and having spaces where they can go and both be together or separate and offer that as well as them running around outside.

I joke about the community here, it reminds me of the '80s when I was growing up and you just basically said, “Go outside. When the streetlights come back on, come in, we'll have dinner,” and then we'll keep on.

Laura Lynch: It sounds like the community has been a pretty welcoming place for your kids. Are there a lot of kids in your community?

Kevin Martin: Yes. I mean, Durango is a pretty — I know the demographics have been shifting recently, but the families

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here, pretty similar, want to be outside, typically love activity, so pretty friendly.

The tiny home community, and I think this is the big thing, is like when you move into a tiny and you choose tiny life, you adopt a broader macro community as well as a micro community.

So, especially earlier on when there were fewer people doing this, you felt very connected to people from across the country because you're in this little space. There's not a huge group of people, you can talk to everybody, and you need to share information and learn, and so there's a lot of that.

And I think the beauty of having these communities pop up in this area is specifically around that. I mean, we now live with people who help and support us. We have kids. I think in this community alone, we have 10, 12 kids that run around. So, it's been amazing.

And we have all sorts of things like potlucks, and we have people who bring food on Wednesdays to support. And so, we're on a text threads, "Hey, we need this, or hey, we need that, or hey, this is happening in my tiny." Okay, "Hey here, this is how you can fix it, or this is what we can look into."

So, I think that that's one of the really cool things. I guess let's go back to what you said earlier, it's like what I didn't expect, is how connected to the community you'd become.

Laura Lynch: Which is such a contrast from sort of the ticky-tacky neighborhood where everybody pulls in their garage and closes the door and people don't know their neighbors.

It seems like that tiny communities, whether digital across the country, or in an actual physical space are kind of a throwback

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to a time when we were more connected with the people around us.

Kevin Martin: There's so much going on in life today. We're so busy and I think the beauty of this movement and these like-minded people who are moving to this, is that they want to slow down, they want to kind of capture what you just said.

A lot of people do come from those types of neighborhoods or those experiences, and those are hard. They can be very hard. HOA rules and different types of zoning stuff that happens, it's hard. Plus, the cost and other things that come with it.

But I agree, I think a big piece for me has been the people I've met and the stories and just how we've come together to resolve different challenges. I think that's a really cool experience with tiny Home.

So, I've lived in multiple neighborhoods, I've had good neighbors, but yes, absolutely, there's people moving around, things are happening, there's a couple people maybe, but here, everybody's looking to help each other. We're all in the same boat, we all face it.

And someone new moves in, purchases one of the tinies here or brings a tiny in and hasn't lived in this life, they come and we can help provide that support as well. And it's just a deeper way of building community versus your bigger home where you're spending so much time inside of it.

Laura Lynch: That's so good. So, let's kind of talk a little bit about how you have advocated for yourself when you were first (you referenced earlier) getting lucky in finding your parking, it was actually making your own luck.

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So, would you unpack that a little bit for us and how you've learned to advocate for yourself and how you've learned all those things that you didn't expect that you would need to know and just kind of share with us a little bit of your progression there.

Kevin Martin: I guess the way I looked at it, when we moved into a tiny, we kind of expected to become an advocate. I think that was true for a lot of people who moved into tinies initially, who didn't necessarily plan on it.

Kind of you knew you had to plan on it, or at least for myself, I knew you had to because there were so many challenges that were faced in locations, especially traveling around.

Okay, city locations are much different than rural locations. So, you really just had to be more engaged and intentional about everything you were doing. And that is kind of how tiny life is.

You build this giant house, or you have these houses, all these modern technologies, and you kind of just go through the motions. But in tiny living, you have to be intentional. You want to be intentional, it's kind of the beauty of it.

And with that, comes the challenges that have really kind of accelerated over the past few years. But where do you park it? What do you do? Are there restrictions? Are there restrictions because you have a flush toilet versus a compost toilet? Do you need to connect water? Do you not need to connect to water?

How do you deal with sewer, gray water versus black water? Do you need certain things? So, all these similar to like an RV kind of flowed in that way. We just kind of did it.

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But again, parking full-time was the challenge. And so, like I said, you got to become an advocate and choose your own destiny. I think there's a lot of people who now don't have to do that because of a lot of people who've put forward the work, but it really starts local.

So, no matter what you're doing, it starts local and focusing on how can you create change or how can you establish processes that you can then really rely on and park and have a place to call home, whether it's purchasing property or whether it's in a park like this, or any of the others that are here in this county.

So, yeah, I think taking that on, whether it's calls to see where we could park it or sending pictures ahead of time. Because they didn't know, was this going to be some eclectic thing that they never seen before? And is it safe?

So, I think people not knowing is a really important piece I think in any movement, in anything we do in life. I think a lot of our own fear or decisions come from just not being knowledgeable about something or having this thought about what it is when in fact, it's actually ... over here it's not quite that, it's over here. I mean, beautiful home.

This looks like any modern home you would see, has all the same things in it, just slightly smaller to scale. So, yeah, so that carried over here.

And when we originally got here in 2018, 2019, spoke with government leaders and our city council and looked at zoning laws to identify what was lacking. And luckily, at that time, there were a few other people who were pushing for this.

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And that's when Escalante, which was the first tiny home community within city limits was created. And when the city basically said, we can use them as ADUs. And so, there were a lot of challenges because they kind of went, "Alright, let's do this."

But there was still not a lot of structure around the building codes and that kind of thing. And one of the things that were happening was like, "Okay, how are they going to fare with fires? Or what's the safety thing going on? Or how are you dealing with waste or sewage? Or where is it getting the water from? How are we tapping in sewers?"

Obviously, with anything new, there's a lot of factors that go into it. And I think those are all things you just need to kind of take in stride and find ways to solve.

Laura Lynch: So, I know you've had even recent meetings with leadership in your city. So, what is the conversation looking like now in a place that has been relatively welcoming?

Kevin Martin: I'm not one to say that I'm an advocate per se. I mean, there are certain things I'm very passionate about. This space was more necessity than anything else. And if no one else is saying or anything or doing anything, it's like I'm not going to let anybody tell me how I'm going to live. I want to make sure that we're building those, those things.

Luckily, in this area, La Plata County, Durango and Colorado itself has been very innovative. They've been pushing the mold, they've been pushing forward. Oregon also was doing it, and that's where we had a house for a little while.

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Washington — and a little, but Oregon and Portland, those cities really kind of pushing it forward. And I think the fact that both the county and the city, first, the city and then the county, but really embraced it.

And what it allowed was a more nimble way to progress the building code and zoning. And so, a lot of the conversations now because of the crisis we're in with housing and the affordability, and having enough affordable housing for people, there's so many organizations that have now come to together to really look at how we solve all of this.

And so, Durango hired an innovation officer where they have someone who's dedicated to finding new and innovative ways to bring in funding, housing, shift zoning, and really innovate.

And I'm a big fan. I work in technology, I work marketing technology and stuff like that, and I'm a very big fan of innovation and pushing. And the beauty is that they want to find ways and so they're embracing different forms.

We have now four tiny home villages within the county, three within the city. Most mobile home parks in the state of Colorado offer that option for tiny to go in, if the space is available.

The houses or ADUs, they can be used as ADUs and they're expanding some of those guidelines. They've opened and actually relaxed a lot of the guidelines. It's not just tiny houses on wheels. I think the alternative side of this is just smaller units, lower cost and footprints to build.

But the core challenges remain cost, barrier to entry, and really what's next? As things skyrocket in cost, prices, all these things — that's been a lot of the conversation point.

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So, it's exciting to be in an area that has been leading this, especially within our state. We've been leading as well in this ... and being able to speak and talk with people who are genuinely really interested in finding ways to improve and adapt, and shift the way we're thinking about housing.

Laura Lynch: That's so awesome to be in a place that you feel like you can be kind of ahead of the curve and not fighting so stubbornly against old ways of thinking, and yet you didn't wake up one day and say, "Hey, I want to be an advocate for this." It's just something that you kind of have to take on in order to accomplish your own goals.

Kevin Martin: And I think that's the thing with tinies. I think now, depending on where you're going, there's a lot of ways that you don't have to do this, but I think no matter what, it's maturing, it's a movement.

And I think the call here is that it's not just we want a smaller house and a house on wheels that goes, yes, there's a contingent of people who do that and want that, but really, it's a shift in the way we have this modern American dream.

This old thing that's started back in World War II to expand and then it's grown and grown and grown. And then you have a huge group of people like myself that are younger and don't need anything big and fancy. We just need something efficient and that holds our stuff, and works for us.

So, the beauty of this, it's kind of like that pendulum. It's kind of like all the way down here where people can't park, and then they're doing these tiny houses and super tiny, tiny houses.

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But then you start seeing the building code move in where you could see park models or you could see alternative living, not just tiny homes on wheels, but just smaller footprint units.

And I think that's how can we build and bring people in, and maybe not build the 1,400 square foot home, but build the 800 square foot home in a really efficient way so it feels like 1,400 square feet and be able to sell it for less or get people in at a lower cost.

Plus, I think a lot of people do want this community feel. And I think there is a piece to that that has been really cool to see.

Laura Lynch: That's so good. And you're so right. This is an evolving movement, and so there are likely to be changes in thinking, and as more municipal regulation and more building code gets involved in whatever, then that sort of curbs some of the wild, wild westness of it from the standpoint that the sort of structural requirements get a little bit tighter and it's just going to evolve, and we all have to just sort of be flexible and willing to move with the movement because change is going to be very present in this space.

And yet at the same time, I feel like that the overwhelming majority of people, young and old still are really anchored in that American dream. That's where the money is going for building largely as for larger and larger footprint homes.

And so, it still has a lot of opportunity to grow and getting the word out on simplicity and community, and maybe we don't need quite so much space, and so advocates are still needed to help spread the word to people that aren't even thinking about this as an option.

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Kevin Martin: And I think that's important. I think the idea here is that everybody's going to make the decision they make, and I'm all for whatever you choose. I'm not one to step in and say, "No, no, no, no, no."

I think the opportunity is just before it was like, "Oh, what's this cute little fad?" And there's a lot of places, especially in major cities and urban areas like Denver and a few others in the East Coast and south, there's a lot of building code restrictions and regulations.

HOA that's for specific building, which defines, and a lot of those are built by conglomerate organizations that have the money that define those. And you have a lot of people that realistically figured Southern California, it blows my mind.

It's just like people want the exact same thing and it's like, "Oh, okay, if that's your thing, good, go for it." But the challenge there is that you're hitting against those structures where it's like, "I want to be able to go and do this," and then there's these regulations that are antiquated, or they are very much in favor of these building practices.

So, the beauty of what I'm seeing and what we've been through and where things are going is that you have new certifications, you have new associations, all these things coming out now that are helping to really bring in a more mature way of approaching the government and zoning and regulations and stuff, which has been working really well, helping to pass some of these legislation up at the state level here. So, that's been huge.

And that does impact the way we ... it absolutely impacts the way that the broader zoning and design options you have are

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happening, especially for the ADU units and secondary units on properties.

So, it's really cool to see that now there's this, "Hey, we don't need this massive house. We could build something a little bit smaller if that's what you choose. You're not going to be restricted on it, but here are the details of what that looks like."

So, it's fun to see. So, it's kind of the evolution, It's the growth and adaptation of what we look at, and yeah, my American dream may look different than someone else's, but at the end of the day, I just want to have a roof over my head and keep it simple.

Laura Lynch: So, good. So, what would you say to folks as we're wrapping up, who are encountering some legal roadblocks? Like there's a community maybe that they've lived in that they want to continue to live in and nobody's really overcome the hurdle yet.

What do you suggest for those folks to help sort of massage the conversation with the powers that be?

Kevin Martin: I mean, that's a great question and this is such a local movement, it varies tremendously on where you are. So, are you in the southern states? Are you in northeast states? Are you in the western states? Are you in cities? But no matter what, it's joining groups.

I think the big thing for me was like Facebook. For us, it was just like always on Facebook, always talking to other tiny homers, and there's a lot of people that have dedicated their time and their effort, and their lives to providing resources and support

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materials on just informational for the people who could then go talk to others.

And so, for me, it's always a conversation. I believe that the power of conversation and talking to the right people and bringing the story, humanizing what it is has always been powerful.

And what I've kind of gone forward on, and from our city council to our designers, to town planners, to any leader in the area, it's really, "Hey, come see my tiny, come see what this is like, look at what this brings and how can we adapt this? Or what does that look like?"

Not every place is going to be as receptive and open to this. And I think the hardest part is being patient and continuing on persevering if that's something that you do. But it usually is going to take a group.

And so, for me, one of the things is just like, "Hey, who are the people that are doing this? Who are the people that are working this? How can we make this easier, more effective, more mature, more supportive of developing more broadly?"

And I think it takes a village, and I think for us, there's a lot of people who are advocates because they're out of necessity. But also, hey, we want to make sure that we have what we need.

So, find the people that are doing it, find the resources online. There's a lot of associations that are happening, there's a lot of new certifications that are coming up to help.

And so, really tapping into that knowledge, that information can really go a long ways. But at the end of the day, find the person

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in your local government or your zoning and just try and meet up with them, try and have a conversation.

Laura Lynch: We've forgotten that everything that gets done in the world is about relationship, and so having a human conversation, sitting down, and telling your story can be really impactful because people do business with people.

Kevin Martin: Well, absolutely, I agree. And I think especially after COVID, we've lost that. And I think it's finding that again, and I think the world's more receptive now and things are moving along.

So, at one point where it felt like there was nothing that was going to happen, even San Diego's looking at reforming some of their building codes to put them in. So, when you see major cities like that or starting to move into this direction, then you know that things are happening.

So, someone's doing it, someone has done it. If you need to replicate it and get that support, that community is out there.

Laura Lynch: Awesome. Well, Kevin, thank you so much for your experience and sharing your growth journey with us. Would you share with listeners anywhere where you might be followed or if someone wanted to get in touch?

Kevin Martin: Yeah, I mean, if they wanted to get in touch with me, they can always reach out via LinkedIn, Kevin Martin, and then I'm on Instagram @Beardifuldad. I work in marketing, so it's not something I'm not like ... two-year sabbatical from social media altogether as I kind of sort through things.

But yeah, you can reach out to me there. Those are the spots. And Tiny Owned Giant Journey, you'll see the video of the

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A Single Dad's Journey to Parenthood and Advocacy in the Tiny House Community

walkthrough. And then this house was featured a DIY of Tiny Luxury, so if they're interested in looking at the original build, they can find that, season three.

Laura Lynch: Perfect. We'll make sure that those links are in the show notes. Kevin, thank you so much for being here today. I really appreciate your perspective.

Kevin Martin: Yeah, thanks for having me.

Hey, I'm honored that you listened to this episode of *Less House More Moolah*. I hope something in it will help you continue to move toward a life aligned with your values.

Every algorithm out there is trying to tell us what to prioritize, but we get to choose. If you haven't ever identified your key values, I have a free resource on my website to help you.

You just have to go to thetinyhouseadviser.com. It's the tiny house A-D-V-I-S-E-R dot com.

At the bottom of the page, you can grab the tiny life values worksheet. When we design a life around "what is our core truth?", we shortcut to deep fulfillment.

See you next Thursday.

Please see the show notes for an important disclosure regarding The Tiny House Adviser, LLC and this episode.

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