

## For the Love of Books

**Anastasia MacLean:** Welcome to the Three Selves podcast. I'm your host Anastasia MacLean. Join us as we chat with fellow Western alumni who've engaged in the often messy, but ultimately rewarding, undertaking of discovering their true self in their life's work.

Today's guest on the Three Selves podcast, Western University alumna Lauren Moore, posted the idea of a book retreat on social media in 2023. Shortly after, that post went viral, Lauren founded Book Huddle. It's a community of avid book readers who help each other find new books and new friends, and who also gather on book retreats that sell out in mere minutes. Firmly in charge of the legacy that she wants to leave, Lauren recalls when it dawned on her that her happy place could also be her career, how trying new things is a voyage of self-discovery and the joy of working with a fellow Western University alumni who identified her writing talent long before she was even aware of it.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Lauren, I am so thrilled to have you with us here today.

**Lauren Moore:** Likewise, thank you so much for having me. I saw the email from Maddy I went, Ah, this is amazing. I'm so honored to be asked to, to be on this wonderful podcast.

**Anastasia MacLean:** It's so gracious of you, thank you. Now you and I both graduated from Western with a BA but our paths post-graduation have been wildly different. First of all, I wanted to ask, was university always in the cards for you, and if so, how you ended up coming to Western.

**Lauren Moore:** I love that you asked this question, because no one in my life has actually ever asked if university was in the cards for me. It was always something that was kind of just naturally expected from really everyone in my high school, it was just the thing that everyone would do. I believe that I looked and applied to McGill and UBC, University of Toronto, and I did this like East Coast tour of different schools with my mom when I was in 11th grade. And as soon as I saw Western it, like, the decision was made, it was over for me.

**Anastasia MacLean:** That was a long trek from you. You came all the way from the West Coast to the East Coast, so you were very committed.

**Lauren Moore:** Yes, very much so.

**Anastasia MacLean:** And you bounced around a bit from program to program while you were at Western. Can we just chat a little bit about that, what prompted that, and sort of the reason why.

**Lauren Moore:** So, when I got to Western, after something like five consecutive years of being the top all-round student award winner at my high school, I got to Western and I was completely lost. Completely lost, because I have always loved learning and I've always loved achieving, but when you get into an opportunity where you need to make some big decisions about your life, I had never really explored what it was that I loved. And I also think that I was really, really disconnected with who I am as a person at my core, because my identity was so tied up in achieving. And I just kept kind of bouncing from program to program, because

I'd be really really interested in, for example, medicine because Grey's Anatomy was big, and my grandfather was a doctor, and I thought maybe I should go into sciences. And then I would also be like, well, I really like business so maybe I'll try the business class. And just like, nothing stuck until I was in my third year and my really good friend, who I ended up working with for over a decade after graduating, he noticed and, and identified that, like I had a talent for writing, and he also said, "You're the only person I know who reads books for fun". He's like, "Why don't you try writing for the Gazette or something?", and I did, and I loved it, I loved writing for the Gazette. And I wrote for the arts and entertainment section of the newspaper, and it was a really great time. And then I was like, "I'm going to take an English class", I'm going to see how that goes. I had always taken the advanced IB classes of English in high school, and it was just something that was very, very natural to me. It was just something that I'd never explored as a career path. I just loved it, and I was in an American Lit class, and we were reading The Scarlet Letter, and it all clicked, and I knew immediately that I needed to transfer into English Lit, and I wanted to read, and I wanted to write for the rest of my life.

**Anastasia MacLean:** What I think is really interesting about that is, within your educational sphere, you didn't know what you wanted to do, but you were finding out by trying things what it is you didn't want to do, so that you could whittle down that list of potential areas of interest, and that's something that people can replicate in their career life as well.

**Lauren Moore:** Yes, absolutely. And my dad constantly reminds me of, what he thinks is a funny story. So, when I first got to Western, I was going to do a double major with MIT and business. And the first semester of Bus101 was accounting, and I hated it. What I didn't realize is that business is much more than accounting at the time, but I called my dad, and I was like, "Dad, I hate business". And I dropped business like right away. And he laughs because now I run a business, I've been running a business for over a decade and it's doing pretty well and he always is like, "Do you still hate business?" every time he hears about something that I've really, really enjoyed.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So you just needed to find the right business. So sometimes we make decisions too quickly about, you know, we don't like something, or we had a teacher for math, and we didn't like that particular teacher class so now we can't do anything to do with math. So, it was great that you were open-minded about the experience going forward. So let's get you out of Western and you're on to New York, I believe you went to, after graduation. What prompted that big move?

**Lauren Moore:** So right after graduating from Western, I think I went straight to New York, and I sublet a room from a friend of a friend of a friend, and I did my internships around the clock, and got some really, really incredible experience with writing. And I remember one of them, it's a now nonexistent fashion blog, but I had an editor who I wrote my very first article, I sent over the draft to him, and I expected him to be like A+ Lauren, this is perfect. I saw him look and kind of frown, and then he got up and went over to the printers, and then he went back to his desk and put this piece of paper, that I still couldn't see but I knew in my gut it was my post, and he pulled out a red pen and ripped it apart. But he pulled me over and he walked me through the decisions and the reasons that he made the changes that he did, and immediately I understood why. But in the span of about five articles of writing for him, my writing skills completely transformed overnight. If I had not done that internship with Gabriel Bell, I don't think that I would have the

career that I have today. He really, really helped me find my writing voice. And so that was, that was a really, really phenomenal experience.

**Anastasia MacLean:** You have a real appetite for learning. You know, you really took it as a learning experience so some of those really, really tough, challenging times we face are actually opportunities disguised as something really hard.

**Lauren Moore:** Absolutely, I couldn't agree more.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So, in New York, I find it very fascinating that you ended up taking improv classes with the Upright Citizens Brigade Theater. Did you find that taking those classes had a profound impact on your approach to your work?

**Lauren Moore:** I loved improv so much because it really, really helped me become comfortable with creativity on my feet. I didn't expect it to have such an impact on me, but I feel like it rewired my brain. It made me comfortable and actually thrive with that “yes and mentality”.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Yes, so that when you're in the group, you don't say no, because that shuts down the improv. You always say yes, and you invite to move on to the next step.

**Lauren Moore:** Yeah, exactly. And so, it helped me from a creativity standpoint, it helped me be able to read other people and also predict creatively what they were going to come up with, and it helped me understand the different strengths that people might have in a creative sense, which was great. But it was very, very fun, and I ended up making a lot of really great friends that I'm still in touch with today.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So you moved on to social media, marketing, communications, those kinds of roles with three massive brands, MTV and Broadcast Music Inc and TWBA, did these opportunities just sort of happen for you? Were you just really lucky that they came into your orbit, or were they part of a strategic career plan?

**Lauren Moore:** I never intended to go into social media as a career, mainly because it didn't really exist as a career when I was first entering the workforce. So, I think it was kind of like right place, right time, right attitude, all coming together in this like amazing, perfect, cosmic storm. What happened was my good friend Phil Palin, who is also a Western alum, he was wanting to work in media, and I think he was getting his MBA at the time. And Charlie Sheen, in the height of his tiger blood insanity phase, posted on Twitter that he was looking for a social media intern and was going to be doing a contest. So, I submitted Phil's name as kind of a joke, and then Phil got notified that out of over 95,000 applicants, we made the top 50,000 and both of us were like, “Oh, this is serious”. And to put it into context, like we're both like, all or nothing personalities, and so for us being kind of over achievers as well, we were like, “Oh, okay, so we need to win, we're gonna win, we're gonna do this”.

So I was behind the scenes, writing all the scripts, coming up with the strategy, figuring out how we could win, kind of, each challenge of this competition, and also drumming up media. And Phil was the face of it. So, he was filming, he was doing all the interviews and basically doing whatever I told them to do. And we ended up getting, in a very short period of time, over 150 media mentions and interviews like internationally

and nationally. And Phil ended up top 50, maybe even top 10, a top spot in this competition. And so I used that experience in my application to MTV, because I was like, this is fun, this requires strategy and psychology, it requires keeping up with trends and anticipating things, but it also, at the heart of it all, requires writing skills. So, I took that experience and I added it to my resume, I included it in my cover letter, and I was like, I don't have formal social media experience, but I just did this, and this took off. And I was the number two person, but then he referred me to another department at MTV, and I ended up getting that job as the head of social media, and it was for MTV World.

So it was, it wasn't by design, I fell into it, but I ended up really, really liking it. I really, really enjoyed it. And then I moved to BMI, which is a performing rights organization that essentially ensures that musicians get paid, who are signed with them, and I had a great experience there. And then I think it was around Hurricane Sandy in New York, when I was sitting in my like powerless apartment that was costing so much money for so little I was like, "I think I'm ready to move to California, I think I'm ready to leave New York". So, I ended up getting an agency job at Designery, which is owned by TBWA\Chiat\Day, and that's when I worked on some really big accounts like VCA Animal Hospitals and Subaru and things like that.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So, let's go back to when you were a child, do you remember ever thinking, "Oh, when I grow up, I want to be a..." and then fill in the blank.

**Lauren Moore:** Oh, my gosh, this is such a funny question. So, when I was in second grade we had career day where you would go to school dressed up as what you wanted to be when you grew up. And I went as a paleontologist. At one point, I wanted to be the first female president in the United States, and then I wanted to be a criminal lawyer because I really liked watching the practice with my mom. Then I wanted to be a doctor because I really liked watching ER with my mom. But it's so interesting looking back because the through line, the constant, the North Star that my compass was internally always pointing to, was reading and were books. It honestly never dawned to me that I could work in the books or a publishing industry at any point, because it was always just my happy place, and I just never really considered it as a career. Which is, you know, really funny, given the situation I'm in right now.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Before we talk about that tantalizing work that you're doing, who got you started on reading, and at what age did you know that you couldn't live without feeding that need to read?

**Lauren Moore:** Looking back, I, I cannot remember a life where I'm not reading something. In second grade, I read *The Hobbit* by J.R.R. Tolkien, and I loved it. I read for at a very high level when I was a child. That was probably the first book that I, that really had an impact on me. But I just loved all of them, like *Bridge to Terabithia*, *Island of the Blue Dolphins*, *Hatchet*, like I feel like the greatest hits at my elementary school books were all so, so good and every single book that we would read in class, I'd be like, "How is this homework? It's amazing. It's so enjoyable".

**Anastasia MacLean:** So what inspired you to start Book Huddle?

**Lauren Moore:** When I was working at that advertising agency in California I was actually teaming up with, and freelancing with my friend, Phil, and he was branding people and helping them grow on social media. And I was helping with the writing and just general social media strategy and I was freelancing mornings,

evenings and weekends for him. And so I remember, I took Phil aside, I took him, I was like let's meet for happy hour I have something I want to talk with you about. And I was like, "I think I should join you full time and I think that we should really try to, like, start an agency". And Phil was like, "No". He's like, "How am I going to pay you I can barely pay myself". And I was like, "Trust me, like people will pay like, the work that we're doing is really, really great, and I just think there's gonna be a need for personal branding".

So, I quit my job three weeks later, and I was like, "Phil, we're gonna do this, we're gonna do this!" And I think at the time we, we decided, like, I would do a commission instead of billing an hourly rate. So whenever we got together, we would do it, and his business tripled in revenue in a year. So Phil and I ended up working together really, really closely for about 10 years, and I was a contractor for him, but I worked basically like right in the agency with him. And we worked with over 350 different brands across all industries, and some of them were big companies and corporations like Campbell's. There were, we worked with the sharks on Shark Tank for a really long time. But we also worked with creators, mainly in the food blogging space.

I learned so much from our clients, both from their experience that I would be interviewing them about to be able to put together their website copy, but also from the things that I would encourage them to do and the strategies that they would choose to do or not choose to do. And so in July of 2022, I started getting a lot of questions from clients about TikTok. But I didn't know TikTok very well, and I was spending a lot of time in the platform trying to understand it. But I felt like, because I wasn't posting, I couldn't put myself in the shoes of clients before they were posting. Like, I wouldn't know how to advise them on how to edit a video, for example, or I wouldn't be able to advise them on a hook. And so, I was like, "I'm gonna try posting on TikTok to better understand it, to better advise clients. And I don't want it to be about branding. I don't want it to be about work. I want it to be about a topic that I'd be so excited to talk about after my longest, worst day ever so I can be really, really consistent with this". And so I chose books! And very, very quickly, Book Huddle took off. And I did not expect it at all, because, again, I wasn't, I wasn't posting there for me. I was posting so I could be able to better advise people. And it's now grown like so, so much, and it's, it's now my full-time job, which is absolutely bananas and not, not being my intent whatsoever.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So, in helping hundreds of brands find their voice, how have those journeys paralleled your own in striving to identify and connect with your authentic voice?

**Lauren Moore:** The beautiful thing about TikTok is that you have to be authentic to succeed. TikTok users are very, very savvy. They know when you are being fake, and they know when you are trying to sell them something. So if you want to succeed, you have to take off that mask, and you have to speak as your most authentic self. So now I feel like I, I know my own voice. I probably didn't back then, like, I feel like, I really feel like it was right place, right time again with TikTok because if I had started posting years before, I don't think I would have succeeded. But because I was coming from a place of, like, exploration and just wanting to be creative for the sake of learning, it was really, really natural for me to just post and not overthink it.

**Anastasia MacLean:** And I think it's amazing that you were looking at it as a learning experience. You were courageous and put yourself out there. And also very disciplined. This is a lot of content you were creating. Each post wasn't a lot of content, but you were posting a lot.

**Lauren Moore:** Something that I would notice when I would work with clients over that decade who would have really, really ambitious goals of growth and follower count, is they would either focus on quantity and creation, but not take the time to actually learn and be objective about what's working, what's not. Or they would be so, so fearful and put so much onus and pressure on one piece of content that once it would flop, after they'd try for like, a month or something, they'd be so disheartened that they would never post again, and then again be disappointed that they don't have the following that they want.

And so I think it's imperative to have an experimental mindset if you're really serious about growing online. Users will tell you what they want from you, they'll tell you. It's been really, really clear to me that my audience does not like when I do very, very long videos. They don't. They actually prefer when I do videos that have text over them, because I'm a much stronger writer than I am speaker. And they really, really like lists where I'll do a roundup of lots of books instead of one dedicated summary of a book. Or if I do one dedicated summary, they just want it to be really, really quick with say what tropes are in it, one sentence elevator pitch, and then that's that. But I know this because I've seen what doesn't work as well, and I've been willing to let that go because I have greater ambitions than just having my life tied up and creating posts that flop.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So, let's get back to Book Huddle. What inspired you to start it and has your pursuit of it then, of something that genuinely reflects your passions, has that evolved into more than you ever envisioned it to be?

**Lauren Moore:** So when I first started posting on TikTok as Book Huddle, I was immediately amazed by how passionate the reader community is online today. Right now is a very, very good time to be a reader, because I would argue that some of the best books of recent history have come out in the past few years. And people have voracious appetites, and it's a really cool place where there's a level playing field, where an indie, self-published book will be just as popular, if not more popular, than one that comes out from a traditional publishing company. And so, what I loved about the BookTok community, at least when I first started posting on TikTok, was the passion and just the voracious nature of people who love reading and who love books online, they really, really like to talk about books. And I was thinking to myself, this was in April of 2023, I don't think that I would join an in person book club because I wouldn't like to have to be on the hook every single week or every single month to be getting together in person and reading with this like, same group of people all the time like I don't think that's for me. But, if it was a retreat, now that would be interesting. A book club weekend where we could get together, go to a really nice place, have good food, drink wine, talk about books, read and go to bed at a reasonable hour, now that sounds great.

And so, in my effort to create content in no longer than five minutes, I posted that idea to TikTok, and very, very quickly it went viral. And I'd gone viral a few times before, but nothing like this, like nothing with the passion like this. And within half an hour, I had tons of comments that were like, "Oh my gosh, please do this". "Can you please do this?", "Can I give you my credit card number?", "Oh, my God, this sounds like heaven". And I realized, wow, there is something really, really special here. Like, I've never had this kind of response. And so I was a little skeptical, but I thought, "Okay, well, if people are interested, then maybe they would fill out a detailed survey telling me what they would like". And so I created this survey that had something like 30 questions, it was really excessive, and unbelievably, 2400 people from around the world

ended up filling this out. And it was quickly too! Like, I think it was, the majority of the entries were like, within three weeks of me posting the video.

And so from there, I was like, “Oh my gosh, if I do a retreat for 30 people, and if I hit what the majority wants when they're voting on each of these parts of the retreat, like I think I could sell this. I think I could do this”. So I found a venue, and I wanted it to be within driving distance of me so it was in Washington, because the majority of people who filled it out were American. And I found this great venue, and I was about to sign this gigantic, scary contract, and I thought to myself, “I think I need a bit more assurance that people would actually be willing to pay for this, because if not, I guess I'm just gonna have to get married here, because this is really, really expensive”. So then what I did is I created a Patreon. And so a Patreon is a subscription, basically where you can pay a monthly amount, and usually it'll be in tiers and it's often used to support podcasters or creatives and you get kind of special bonuses by being a subscriber, and you're also supporting like a creator that you like. So I created a Patreon, and I said that if you join the Patreon you will get early access to reading retreat tickets, 24 hours before anyone else, and you will get a coupon that you can use towards your ticket. And I was, remember being shocked because I sent out an email blast announcing that, and I put it on TikTok, and 90 people signed up for the Patreon. And at the time, I only wanted to sell 30 tickets. I think I needed to sell like 20 to break even or something. And I was like, “Oh my gosh, more people have signed up for the Patreon than tickets I have available maybe I'll increase it to 40”. And anyway, the first retreat ended up selling out really, really quickly. And so I put together another retreat and put that for sale a month later, and we just sold our 14th retreat, and now the tickets usually sell out in two to three minutes.

**Anastasia MacLean:** That's incredible.

**Lauren Moore:** It's really wild. I mean, I know I'm probably saying this very casually but believe me it's because I'm like having an out of body experience whenever I think about this.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So what would you say are some of the most profound steps that you've taken in shaping the Book Huddle brand and experience that others can learn from in shaping their own passion driven work lives?

**Lauren Moore:** I think it's really important, first and foremost, to understand what your values are and what your bigger, more long term goals are, with any with any endeavor that you do. So for me, inclusivity and diversity are super, super important to me. A lot of authors who are from marginalized communities don't necessarily get the marketing support that I think that they deserve. It's really, really important for me to prioritize lifting other voices and reading about experiences that are different from my own. And also I make a really, really, really conscious effort to read and feature books by authors from marginalized communities. Part of, kind of that inclusive mindset, people cannot buy a ticket to my retreat unless they sign and agree to a waiver that I have that they will be respectful of everyone, no matter their ethnicity, their sexuality, their gender, their religion, and that's super important to me. And I think it's critical for people to know that from the get-go that this, this is a community where you can feel safe and where you will be respected.

Those are the main, the main things too. Like, I've got, obviously, a few other values. Like, for me, joy and happiness are really important parts of my brand, so I actually never share or promote books that I don't like, and I won't do a negative review on a book, because that just doesn't feel like something I want to do. I'd rather just focus on stuff that is great, that I think, that, you know, people might really enjoy.

And so that's one thing and then the other thing is analytics is, I think, really, really critical. There is this client that I worked with many, many years ago who used to tell her own coaching clients that success leaves clues and I believe that. I believe success leaves clues. And for example, the TikTok video going viral, that was a clue. The 2400 people filling in the survey about reading retreats, that was a clue. And I find comfort in numbers, and I find comfort in probability, and so I try to apply that mindset when I'm analyzing the performance of a piece of content or when I'm evaluating a retreat venue, I really, really like to use numbers, because I think that numbers don't lie.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Even though you didn't like your accounting class, you're still a numbers girl.

**Lauren Moore:** I do love numbers in that; I just don't like checks and balances. I'll let my bookkeeper deal with that.

**Anastasia MacLean:** And I noticed in your answer you talked about steps that you took that all align with who you are and what you value, so that your brand is an expression of that. It just naturally comes from you so it's like you're the brand, and the brand is you.

**Lauren Moore:** Yes. It is, it is a bit surreal to build a large community and be the face of it when you don't really love being on camera. And my hope is, is that when you experience the Book Huddle brand you can feel that. Something that I'm really, really proud of is my very first Tiktok post was July 2022, and so it's been about two and a half years or so since my very first post, and now the Book Huddle community is almost 400,000 readers across social media channels. And I get DMS from people saying, "You know, I was going through a really, really hard time, but this community and your content brings me so much joy, and you helped me find my favorite book, thank you". And I just think that people today are really lonely, and I think what's so special about this community is it's brought this incredible, incredible large group of open minded, kind, passionate people, who are often introverted, and it's created a space for them to feel like they can be themselves and that's something I'm really, really proud of.

**Anastasia MacLean:** So, if you take a look back at your journey so far from where you started at Western and looking to figure things out, and then to where you are now with this incredible Book Huddle community, was there a moment along the way when you realized that your life's work would be a journey and not a particular destination.

**Lauren Moore:** I've always been someone who's very, very motivated by goals, and I've always been someone who has something cooking on the side. And I realized this at the very beginning of my career, not so much at Western, even if I have a day job, I need to have something where I am experimenting and being creative outside, that I'm doing just for me because you never know how that's going to come into your life or change as time goes on. So for example, when I was at that agency and freelancing with Phil, that ended up parlaying me into a different career path. And then with Phil and trying out Book Huddle, then that

ended up becoming a career path. And now at Book Huddle, I'm actually writing my very first fantasy book, and I'm about 70% of the way through the manuscript. I don't know if it's gonna be any good, I don't know if I'm gonna be a great author, but it's just something that I'm doing because I'm curious. And so I'm not sure if I have an opinion on journey versus destination, but I do have a really firm opinion on the benefits of being curious and trying new things for the sake of discovering something new, but also discovering more about yourself.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Well and in trying new things instead of, “Oh, this may not work, I don't know if I can write a book, I don't know if anyone will read it, I don't know if it'll get good review, I just don't know”, think about what if it really took off? What if people really loved this book? What if I really was meant to be an author? What if this is another aspect of who I am that I can indulge in and find that people enjoy. Along with your curiosity having that sort of, let's just give it a shot attitude, I think is something else that's really helpful for people who are sort of caught somewhere they don't want to be and want to get somewhere else.

**Lauren Moore:** Yeah, I couldn't agree more.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Can you describe the one career related, let's call it a wrong turn that you took, that you learned the most from and are grateful for.

**Lauren Moore:** I've got a really good one. So something that you need to know about me, I'm very introverted. I like people, but I recharge on my own. And there was an opportunity when I was first starting my career in New York to freelance for the magazine Time Out New York. But it wasn't just any freelance position, it was being a nightlife reporter. And I go to bed at, naturally, at like nine 9, 9pm but in New York parties don't start until like 2am. And so, I would get assignments of different parties around the city, and I would go and I would work with a photographer, and I would have to get quotes from the random people at the party, and then they'd get photos taken of them, and then I'd have to pull out this scary legal document that they would need to sign so that we could use their photo on the website and in the magazine. And it was really, really hard. First of all, it was very tough to get quotes from people when there was like, a very, very loud DJ in the room and also just, it was just challenging to like approach strangers.

So, nightlife reporting was not my destiny. It was not great, and it was a lot of work for very, very little money. I think by the end of, by the time after going to that party, compiling the quotes, identifying who was in the photographs, and also, like writing the thing that was covering the party, I made like \$75 total. Like it was like real, it was like pennies. But, it was very, very useful because it taught me how to be able to, like, physically read people and approach them and make them feel safe within my presence. It taught me how to concisely review something that I was not naturally very familiar with. And so I would be reviewing these parties, and they would have to be in within like five sentences, which was challenging, but that ended up being very useful when doing social media posts. And, it was also just a really cool way to see parts of New York City and other people that I would otherwise never cross paths with. So I hope I never do that again but I'm very grateful for the experience.

**Anastasia MacLean:** And is there one person who has had a profound influence on you and your career?

**Lauren Moore:** Without a doubt, it would be Phil Palin, the Western alum. Phil has this incredible ability to see people's talents before they're aware of it themselves. I never thought of myself as a good writer. I never considered that I might want to do that, or that I was better at it than anyone, like it never even crossed my mind. And I didn't even know that I really liked it, and Phil saw that in me, and not only nurtured it, but encouraged me to pursue it. And then we worked together for 10 years. It was like unreal, and we're still really, really good friends. So yeah.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Yay Western connections!

**Lauren Moore:** Yes, yes, and that's just the tip of the iceberg. I mean, honestly, my greatest friends today, majority of them I met at Western, which is wild. I know people always say that the friends you make in university are the ones you'll have for life, but I never really believed them, but it's true.

**Anastasia MacLean:** And the final series of one questions, what's one risk that you've taken in your career that had a significant payoff?

**Lauren Moore:** I think signing a contract for my first reading retreat. It, it was a really scary decision to make. I've never done any event planning before, and now, 17 months later, we've sold tickets to over 600 people and have a 99% satisfaction rating. And while I don't plan to scale the retreats at all, I still want them to be done sparingly, so I can be really, really, really involved with them and make them just the best that they can be. But people have made lifelong friends from these retreats. A lot of people have come back, and actually, the retreats have been so meaningful to people that there are 10 people out there who have gotten tattoos of the Book Huddle logo to commemorate their retreat experience and how much this community means to them. I just am so grateful for the people who took a chance buying tickets to the first retreat, because it gave me the confidence be able to pursue a Book Huddle full time.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Sometimes I feel like we have to let go of certain things, certain beliefs, or certain ideas or even certain relationships, and really get quiet and just be for a bit to get to where we need to go or where we want to end up. Do you agree?

**Lauren Moore:** I completely, completely agree. I would say that the most valuable thing that I've learned in my career and in adulthood is stopping and listening. Listening to me, listening to that voice inside of me. Because a lot of people are going to have opinions on how you live your life and what you do, and they're going to have opinions about who you are. But the most challenging thing for me has been learning that not all opinions are equal, and the number one most important opinion is, is mine because it's my life, and I need to live it in a way that brings me satisfaction, and I need to be in charge of the legacy that I want to leave in this world.

**Anastasia MacLean:** In addition to the importance of checking in with yourself, are there some lessons learned, and I'm thinking specifically of some tips or suggestions that you could share with your fellow alumni who aren't at the stage you are at now. You sound very clear about who you are, where you are, where you want to go, what resonates and works for you career wise but for those of our alumni who are in a state of turmoil or change or wanting to make a change, are there some specific first steps they can take towards that end goal.

**Lauren Moore:** If you are not happy with your life right now, first of all, I just want to say that you can change your life at any point in time. We are in a really, really wild time period where growing an online presence or doing things online can grow very, very quickly. And I know, not from my own experiences but from the experiences that I've had working with others, and so I would say first of all, feel confident and feel like you can really, you can really steer the direction of your life. The other thing I would say, I, I do recommend having that side hustle no matter what and really, really grow that side hustle until you are making about the same money as your day job so it's a seamless transition over. Keep that day job as long as you can. I did this with every career transition of my life, it's required a lot of work, a lot of late nights but I'm so glad I did because then I had peace of mind and wasn't always worrying about where my next dollar would come from because I had already figured out how to make money from that second venture and it was just a seamless jump over.

And then the last thing that I'll say for anyone who is maybe currently running a business, or, you know, making money and things like that, is the, the sooner that you can figure out where you create the most value and the most impact, the better. A lot of times in my life, I felt like I need to kind of do everything, and I need to do everything because I know that I'm not going to make mistakes on it, or if I do make a mistake, then, like, that's my, my problem, but I'll own it. And it wasn't until about six months ago where I got really, really comfortable making a list of things that I love doing that are high value and things that I don't love doing that that are low value and starting to delegate or create automations or processes so that I don't have to be as involved in those things.

**Anastasia MacLean:** Lauren, this has been such a treat. Thank you so much for all of your incredible stories and the obvious passion that you have for everything that you do the time has just flown by.

**Lauren Moore:** Thank you so much for having me and yeah, it has, it has gone by really, really quickly. Thank you.