

Ricky Liorti

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.

A graduate of Western's Faculty of Information & Media Studies and the Operations Manager for his family's construction company, Ricky Liorti is also a passionate pickler, first-time published poet and uber-popular podcaster. Join us courtside as this unstoppable entrepreneur shares his "airport test" for selecting team players, how working for the family business has enabled him to indulge in a host of side quests, and why sometimes when you think you need to make a drastic change in your life, all you really need to do is pivot.

Anastasia MacLean: Ricky, thank you so much for being with us today.

Ricky Liorti: Thank you, guys, for having me this is awesome.

Anastasia MacLean: So, you're a business owner, you're a passionate, what I'll call pickle baller, you have a very popular podcast and most recently, a published author. So, before you dove into all of that, was going to university always a part of your plan, or something your parents wanted you to do, or a way to figure out what you wanted in life?

Ricky Liorti: Do you know what, it was a little bit of all three of that. I knew as a kid I was going to go to school, and my parents always put a strong emphasis on university. None of my family members had previously gone to university prior to my brother, I guess I had an older cousin, but the Liorti's in general never really went to university or college, they just were always in the trades, they were always, you know, in skilled labor or construction or whatever it was. My dad and my mom always put an emphasis on schooling. We're going to go to college, university, we're going to study something that we think we love, and we're going to go, and we're going to complete it and get our degrees. My brother, thankfully, decided to go to Western, he's two years older than me, and on one of my high school trips, I went to go visit him at Western and I fell in love instantly with the campus, the idea of living away, I stayed with my brother you know, it was just one of the coolest experiences.

So, I was 16 years old or 17 years old at the time, thinking like, oh my gosh, this is going to be my life soon. I went there and I think I applied to 4 or 5 different programs at Western. I didn't know what I was going to study, but I knew I was going to Western for sure. Thankfully I ended up getting into the MIT program, *Media, Information, Technoculture*, and yeah, the rest is kind of history. I loved it, I was so happy I got to go away. And I always say this, it's not so much about what I learned directly in the classrooms, it's what I learned just being there. You know, living on my own, time management, like financial management, and then obviously what I learned in school definitely helped me in a lot of my different career paths now but at the time, it was more just like, hey, I learned how to grow up.

Anastasia MacLean: I remember you saying that when we spoke earlier, that you really learned how to grow up at Western. I found the same thing, and I think our experiences parallel each other a bit, too, because I knew I was always going to go to university, and it was driven really hard in my brain by my mom growing up. Like it was not a maybe or, you know, possibly or probably, it was you're going to university, period. And then it was the same school bus trips. And we went to a few different places in Ontario, and I came to Western, and it was the exact same thing, I went, "This is where I belong".

Ricky Liorti: Yep. See, I did it wrong. I went to go visit Western first, and then every other school I saw after, I was like, "Okay, yeah, I'm not going here". And like, no disrespect to any other school, it's just when you see Western first and you're in London and you see, you know, especially I think I went in the fall too, with all the

colors and everything I was just, ugh, it was decided the moment I stepped foot on campus, you know, in my grade 11 year that I was going there, no questions asked.

Anastasia MacLean: So, I know that you have your own social media marketing company, and you co-founded another company with a fellow Western alumnus, George Boutsalis. Now, did you know George beforehand?

Ricky Liorti: No, actually, we randomly met there. So I, I was in Elgin in first year and so was he, we didn't know each other at the time, and my brother was in a fraternity and George ended up joining this fraternity. And then one day we're at the gym and like, I guess he recognized me or something. Two days later, my brother's like, "Oh, that's Ricky". He's like "I know that guy". But we didn't get along the first time we met and now, you know, here we are 15 years later, and we're basically best friends. We've traveled the world together, we've started different businesses together. We spend so much time together that it's, uh, it's really nice that you can create those lifelong friends. And I have friends that I went to Western with from my high school and from playing hockey growing up, and we're all still friends, too. So, it was really nice that we had a large community of us from Toronto and, you know, even like new friends we made, everyone just got along really, really well.

Anastasia MacLean: And that's wonderful how people can go to university and meet people that not only they're friends with for life, but also that they end up working with. So, you know you can really be inspired by what you do with your life and your life's purpose by the people you meet who share that journey with you.

Ricky Liorti: Oh, definitely. George, me and him, when I was at Western, I did events, and George would be my DJ half the time. So, we kind of started doing a little mini business ventures back at Western. And then we started an app together and that was, you know, an insane journey that we went on, and it was so much fun. Although, you know it technically failed from a financial standpoint, the experience we gained, the knowledge we learned you can't put a price tag on that.

Anastasia MacLean: And you've hit on a couple of really important things when you say that. One, the willingness to try and to, quote unquote fail, and you explained fail meant it wasn't, you know, financially successful, but you learn so much from it so that's a really big win from that perspective. And just that willingness to try and do it on a small scale before you go into something big. So, for people who are thinking about, I'm not so happy with what I'm doing right now, I think I need a change, take an opportunity to try something and maybe you want to volunteer, or maybe you want to help out a friend with something, or maybe you want to turn something that's a hobby that you're passionate about, see if there's an opportunity to turn that into a business. So those are two really good, important points that I think you just hit on organically.

Ricky Liorti: Yeah, it's funny, a lot of times people say, "Oh, I need a drastic change in my life". It's like, do you though? Do we really need drastic changes? Like, maybe sometimes you just need to pivot. I'm not saying we're taking a 180 here, but, hey, maybe let's just change the course of our direction for a little bit here. Maybe let's just branch off, do something slightly different. Maybe that's the key. But yeah, to make a drastic change, sometimes can be a little bit tricky, especially with the long-term longevity of it, might be a little tricky. But yeah, sometimes people just need a little, a small pivot to, uh, to head in the right direction.

Anastasia MacLean: Something else that you mentioned when we talked before is that working in the family business, and I want to get back to that, but working in the family business enabled you to pursue side quests that fulfill you. Is that the kind of thing you're talking about?

Ricky Liorti: Yeah, so my side quests, and I've been saying them a little bit more than I would like to recently. I find myself doing all these side quests because I'm the type of person, I need to be busy. So I'm at my day job every day, Monday to Friday, 9 to 5 and I'm here and I love what I do. Again, it's my family business, I've been

here for a decade, so this is a place I call home, this is a place I feel comfortable. And I, and I love it here and I love what we do, and I do think our work makes a big impact in my region, in the city of Toronto. But one of the things I love the most about it is that I have the opportunity to pursue other dreams, or other activities, or other ideas that I might not have had the opportunity to do if I wasn't at the family business. It's almost to a fault though. My boss is my dad and my uncle. They, they give me a lot of free rein on a lot of things that I do, and because of that, I find myself taking on a little bit more than I can chew off at some points. But overall, I love it here and I'm so happy with everything I do. This will always be home to me, but the side quests are sometimes what really kind of get me going on the weekends and the late, late nights and early mornings.

Anastasia MacLean: So, you've been the operations manager then, with the family business, so when you were little, did you think that everyone's dad had their own business?

Ricky Liorti: Do you know what, I didn't but a lot of my friends' dads also worked in construction or had their own construction companies. So, I just found it very strange that my dad and all my other friends' dads all knew each other, and everybody just kind of got along awkwardly well because they were all in the same kind of space. But as a kid, I never thought I'd end up being like my father. I said, "No way am I ever going to work in construction". And my dad and my mom, shockingly, never pushed me to either. Um, but no, I never thought that everyone's dad did it, I just found it so funny that all our dads kind of did the same thing. So, when I talked to people whose dads who had other jobs other than construction I was like, "Well, okay, there are other things to do out there".

Anastasia MacLean: So, there wasn't the expectation that you be part of the family business or take it on, you know that there'd be succession planning from your dad to you to take over it, but did your father's entrepreneurship inspire your own?

Ricky Liorti: Yeah. So, there was never any pressure to take over the family business, and I've got an older brother and I've got an older cousin who's part of the business as well. So, there was a couple of us kids that worked in the business at the time, but there was never any pressure. It was always go do what you want, go do what makes you happy and go pursue your dreams. That was always, kind of always, one of the biggest things that they always pushed towards. Um, my dad never had a boss so, you know, seeing him kind of make his own hours and do his own thing. Yeah, he worked really hard, he missed a lot of my hockey games when I was a little kid, and he worked early mornings and late nights, but he drove me to school almost every single day of my entire life. Um, so that was always really cool and it was nice always knowing that he never had the boss, he was always his own boss. And while there are a lot of downfalls and a lot of risks with being your own boss, you can see a lot of the cool things that happen because he was his own boss, and you know you see a lot of the risks he took 20 or 30 years ago kind of coming to fruition now, which is really nice. But I think the idea of knowing my dad never had a boss always made it hard for me to have a boss. Even though my dad is technically my boss now, my dad and my uncle but, um, yeah, just seeing him do his own business and, uh, I guess it technically did inspire me or else I wouldn't be starting new businesses every year or every two years now.

Anastasia MacLean: So, the fact that you're so busy and you have such an eclectic mix of things that you're interested in, what's your earliest memory around the following fill in the blank statement: "When I grew up, I want to be...?"

Ricky Liorti: I wanted to be a firefighter because I hated smoking. So I'm like, I'm not going to smoke, I'm going to have the best lungs ever, I'm going to be a firefighter. That or I wanted to be a professional hockey player. I want it to be Felix Potvin from the Toronto Maple Leafs. Those are my two earliest ones that, kind of, really stand out. And shockingly enough, I'm neither of those.

Anastasia MacLean: Let's talk for a minute about taking risks. You've said previously that working in the family business taught you how to take risks. What did you mean by that, and what's an example of that?

Ricky Liorti: Um, I got a good one that comes to mind. When I was younger, you know, the family business wasn't what it is now. You know, now we employ over 200, 250 employees and, you know, we are a good-sized company that does a lot of major infrastructure work all over the GTA. But 20 years ago, when I was a kid, it wasn't like that. I remember, you know, my parents paying off one credit card with another credit card, taking, you know, serious financial risks so that me and my brother could play sports and have the opportunities that we had growing up. Like they always put me and my brother first before themselves. But I remember the struggles financially that it took and, you know, my father's business was always doing fairly well, but if you don't get paid and times are tough and your clients don't have the financial resources to pay you for the job you did, well, did you actually make any money? No, you didn't. And then when the recession came, like it's hard on everybody, especially the, the owner operators because, you know, not only do they have to pay their staff, but they got to try and, you know, put food on the table for themselves and their families.

So, I just remember being a kid thinking, you know, I knew my dad's business was well run, I knew it was good, I know they employed, you know, a good amount of people but why did it seem that we weren't really doing well? Obviously now things have changed, and the business is in a very good financial spot which is, which is amazing, I'm so happy for it. Um, but yeah, you see those risks, you see those kinds of tight timelines. It's a little different now, obviously and, you know, we've been around for 46 years, but I remember hearing those stories when I was a kid or in my early teens and, you know, you hear about the risks that they take and not being able to make payroll is a risk I hope to never have to know, because I can't imagine the stress that that would be like.

And, you know, taking on a job that's a little bit bigger than what you've done in the past to get to a different stage, to put yourself on that next level is obviously tricky and it's scary at times. And we're still doing it now. We're, we're doing bigger jobs now than we did ten years ago, bigger jobs than we did five years ago and every time you get that next big job, you're like, "Okay, like, I know we can do this", but there's always the risk of the unknown and there's always a risk in any job you do. So, um, I guess seeing some of those has prepared me to see them in the real world. Um, and obviously, growing up, I'm a risk taker, I like to think I am because, you know, I think in your younger years, it's the right time to take it. But, um, I just believe that there's no reward that doesn't have risk.

Anastasia MacLean: Yeah. So, I think that risk taking is essential to pursuing one's purpose, right? You're not going to find it, you're not going to live it, you're not going to experience it unless you're willing to be uncomfortable, put yourself out there. So, what's one risk that you've taken that has had a significant payoff for you, career-wise?

Ricky Liorti: Ooh. There's a whole bunch that, that come to mind. Um, when I started doing this content business, I knew nothing about it. Like I read a ten-page eBook on how to be a content creator, how to be an influencer, and I had no idea what I was doing, and I was 32 years old making TikToks. And my friends were like, "Ricky, like, what are you doing, go back to your day job". And then here we are 3 years later, and the business is, you know, doing very well and I've got a full-time staff, I'm with an agency now. I've worked with, you know, some pretty cool brands all over Canada, I've got to travel to different countries and different cities for this business. Um, so that's pretty cool but at the time it was, pretty terrifying, you know.

Even with the pickleball team, I was the only non-pickleball owner in this league. Everybody had pickleball backgrounds, whether they played professionally or whether they were involved in it for 4 or 5 years. And here I am, just this kind of energetic, happy go lucky guy that comes around and thinks he's going to put together this pickleball team. And everybody laughed at me because my first pick was a female that never played in this country, and nobody's ever heard of her. And here we are, you know, a year later and we won the country's first ever professional pickleball championship. And this was with a group of people that nobody wanted at the beginning, nobody's heard of, nobody talked about, so that was definitely another risk. And I could go on for days about risks I've taken that have paid off and, again, there's risks that haven't paid off too

like with the app. But you know, you learn from it, and I think learning from those mistakes has helped me in some of these recent businesses and hopefully will help me in more businesses down the road.

Anastasia MacLean: What I love about what you said is your willingness to pursue things and be tenacious about things, even in the face of not getting the kind of support that you would have liked to have gotten from some of the people that were close to you. You had people saying to you, “What are you doing, go back to your day job”, which you could always do, it was always there, you had that to fall back on. But you still were relentless about seeing through what you saw through. And you’ve had instances of what people would call, quote-unquote, success and instances of not so much success, and yet regardless, you continue to try things. So, what is it about your character, do you think, that you will see things through even where you don't have the kind of support that other people would need to take the risks that you've taken? Why, why keep going?

Ricky Liorti: Um, I just think that's just how I am. I'm not a quitter, I refuse to quit um, and that's one thing I love about myself, is that no matter what, if I set a goal or if I say I'm going to do something in my mind, it's already done. I've already completed it. You know, this year is a great example. I said I was going to run one marathon and six half marathons in this, in this calendar year, and I ran my first half marathon and I already had the feeling that the rest were already done. But yeah, I think it's just I've been raised to never quit. If you're going to quit, there's got to be a reason why and it better be a good one, it better not be an excuse because there are people that would be beyond grateful to have the opportunities I have. So, if I don't use those opportunities and do them to the best of my abilities, then I'm just, I'm wasting myself and I'm wasting what potential talent I might have or I might never knew I had if I didn't try.

Anastasia MacLean: And the pickleball that you talked about, the passion that you have for it, how did you get turned on to the sport and what really spurred your commitment to it, both in terms of founding that professional team, but also your outreach efforts, your pickleball in the mall.

Ricky Liorti: Yeah. So, um, I fell in love with pickleball down in Florida, my mom's a snowbird I guess I could say, and she was playing with her friends, I went down there, and I had a blast playing with her friends. And I said, you know what sport can a guy in his low 30s play with his mother who's had a double hip replacement, his father who's a little bit overweight and, you know, the other people at the community park in Florida? And pickleball is the only sport I can think about. So, I started playing it, I said “This is great”. Started looking into it as a business and then that led me to the Canadian National Pickleball League and obviously Toronto United. And then I said, “Okay, now I've got this team, and I've got this little business going, I'm really happy but how do I get more people playing? How do I introduce it to more people?” And I saw the concept down in the States where people were renting out old like Zellers or Sears and turning them into pickleball facilities.

So, I reached out to one of my favorite malls in the city of Toronto, Sherway Gardens, and I said, “Guys, what if we were to put a pickleball court in the middle of the mall, how much fun would that be?” They were like, “Well, how are you going to make any money?” I was like, “Well we’re not. This is going to be an event to grow the community, grow the game, keep people healthy, bring people to the mall”. So, we're very fortunate enough that Sherway Gardens believed in my kind of, wild vision at the beginning of it, and they partnered with us to do it. My partners at TSS, Total Sports Solutions, they built this gorgeous court in the middle of the mall, and you know now we have this court that is basically cut to the size of the center of Sherway Gardens so every year we can do this event and have this gorgeous court set up there. So, I think without the team we have behind us, like internally and externally, and the partners we have, a lot of these things don't happen. But pickleball in the mall was one of the coolest events ever, the first time it's ever been done in Canada, over 200 people introduced to the sport of pickleball. We had pro matches, exhibition, we had so much fun that day and um, even Sherway Gardens and Cadillac Fairview, they want to keep doing this so as long as they keep letting us do it, we're going to keep running it.

Anastasia MacLean: So, you talked about the people that you selected for your team and they weren't top picks, as far as other people were concerned, and I suspect that some of the characteristics or character traits that you saw in them are very translatable to the kinds of characteristics people need to have if they want to make a change in their life, if they want to, you know, explore and move on and try different things in terms of figuring out their life's work. So, what were those characteristics that you identified in these people that went beyond are you great at pickleball and so on.

Ricky Liorti: Yeah, and I got one really good example, um, of one of our players this year she wasn't even drafted. We picked her up, you know, mid-season. She's a doctor and I said, "Okay, she's a great pickleball player nonetheless, but I said if she's got the mental strength and the mental fortitude to go to med school, to put in, I don't even want to know how many hours, if she's got that mental strength and that mental attitude to still live a normal life, go out and travel, have a social life, play pickleball, she can do anything she puts her mind to it". And when we picked her up, nobody knew who she was, it wasn't a thought on anybody's radar. By the end of the year, everyone says that was one of the best pickups of the year, she was an amazing player. So, if she's listening Senaya, Senaya's her name she's, uh, she's phenomenal, she's a great human being and one of the biggest things for us was, you know, the airport test. If I got stuck at an airport with these people for 4 to 6 hours, would I be okay with them? And I can confidently say each and every one of them, I'm glad to call friends, they're all amazing people. One of the hardest parts about building this team is that I can't keep everybody, but I can confidently say we've always put together the right group of people. We didn't win on the court, but one of our, our mission statements and our core values is making sure we win off the court as well and each and every year, I know we will continue to win off the court for sure.

Anastasia MacLean: I think you just hit on something else that's really important for people who are taking a look at what they do and where it is they are and where they want to go and that is when you doubt yourself, to remind yourself of what you have in your life that's good, and why you made the decisions that you've made.

Ricky Liorti: Especially with businesses, I feel like sometimes you don't hit your key targets, your KPIs or whatever your goals are. Sometimes we forget all the other, kind of, non KPIs or the other non-goals you ended up hitting. Now this year for the pickleball team obviously the end goal is you want to win. Each and every year you want to win. And we didn't win this year, we didn't even come close. But we put together a good team, we introduced an insane amount of people to the sport in our region, we helped grow the sport, we built our brand. So yeah, maybe we didn't hit that end goal, but we definitely didn't fall that short on a lot of other things. So, it's important to see, okay, maybe you didn't hit those main goals, but you still did a lot. Like be happy that you did and appreciate those steps because, you know, it's not always about that last end big goal, there's those baby steps along the way too.

Anastasia MacLean: And that kind of attitude is what propels you on to the next thing that you do.

Ricky Liorti: And I said I got to kind of stay back and stop trying to do these next things and focus on the ones I'm doing because, sometimes when you're going this fast, you're getting to your destination, you're just trying to get to the next one instead of really stopping and appreciating the journey. You know, this summer was one of those times where I think I was just so focused on everything I was doing. You know, the pickleball team, my content, my day job, my book, that I wasn't enjoying any of them. I was going through the motions, trying to check off that next to do list item, trying to get that next goal, achieve that next milestone that I didn't stop and appreciate, what I'm doing is insanely cool right now. What I'm doing is remarkable. What I'm doing is not being done by many people that I know, like, let's sit and let's enjoy this because, you know, we should celebrate the wins. Just like we sometimes, you know, review the losses and we kind of, you know, we were just talking about falling short of your goals, we sit there and say we didn't hit those, but when we hit those goals, we should really appreciate them and say, hey, you know what? I worked hard for this, I earned this, I deserve this. And a lot of times we fall short because we're already on to the next one. So, I said one of the biggest things for me this year, and I've been trying to remind myself every, uh, every day is to slow down. Slow

down and appreciate the journey. Let's not just stay focused on our goals, while that's important, let's slow down and let's enjoy the journey. Because one day there's, the journey is going to be over, and then we're going to be looking back and saying, you know, where did that all go? I did so much, but why can't I remember enjoying any of it? So slow down. That's what I've been telling myself lately.

Anastasia MacLean: I love that you bring up the word journey, because it makes me think about how, for people like you, your life's work is a journey, it's not a particular destination, it isn't one end point. And is there a time, at any point in your life so far, that you realized that your life's work would be a journey and not just a destination?

Ricky Liorti: Um, I think I've always known it was going to be a journey. This game of life isn't always linear. Sometimes you're going backwards, sometimes you're going sideways, sometimes you're upside down going in the complete opposite direction. Um, but it's definitely a journey. I think, like I said, it's important to really enjoy it because if you're always just chasing those next destinations and chasing that next milestone, chasing that finish line, you're never going to get there because you're always just going to keep moving it. Um, I'm used to, mostly, appreciating the journey because with my life, I kind of never know what I'm going to do next and while it's really exciting, it's also nerve wracking that, you know, I have no idea what my life's going to look like in six months. I know I'm going to be here, at my day job, my home, you know Metro Contract is my home and I love this place and I love the business my family's built. But all these side quests that I find myself on, I'm just like, where are we going today?

Anastasia MacLean: So one of your side quests that I wanted to chat about, I guess ironically enough here we are with our podcast and this is a new one for us, but you could probably podcast in your sleep because you have a huge following and something like almost 300 episodes under your belt. So, tell us a little bit about the Pals podcast that you started with George, and did you envision it as a steppingstone for your career, or was it another way to connect with people and broaden your reach? What inspired it?

Ricky Liorti: So, it's funny enough because this would have been mine and George's, I think our second technical business adventure together. The first one was when we used to, you know, host events, we worked side by side on a lot of things. And then we were actually down in Florida, this would have been 2019, and we were talking about New Year's resolutions and goals and just really getting organized and one thing I said is like, "I want to do something I've never done creatively. I don't know what it's going to be, but I want to do something I've never done". And he's like, "What if we started a podcast?" I'm like, "That's a great idea". Like, it's a chance for us to sit down once a week for at least an hour, no cell phones, no TV, just me and you and let's chat right? So, we got back from Florida, George went out and got all the equipment, and George is good technically. And we recorded our first episode, we had a blast, so we did a second episode, we did our third. I think by our fourth or our fifth, we had an Olympic medalist on, Eric Radford. We had Jonathan Osorio from Toronto FC. We had, I think, 4 or 5 notable guests and then obviously COVID happened. But because we were just a small kind of network, once things started to open up, the big agencies and the big media publications weren't open yet, so you know we had Donovan Bailey, Penny Oleksiak, a couple NHL hockey players, a whole bunch of people on the podcast. And we just kept doing it because we enjoyed meeting new people, we enjoyed hanging out, we're best friends.

So unfortunately, George left the podcast, uh, in 2023. Um, you know, his family business took off and he was doing a lot, he was getting married, so he had a lot of other commitments. But I continued it with one of our other best friends and me and her, Dani, we've been doing it together ever since. And, yeah, we just probably released that 300th episode, which is obviously super exciting. It's a grind, but it's well worth it.

Anastasia MacLean: I feel like there's, um, a real openness and a vulnerability in how you present yourself in social media. Is there something that many people don't know about you, and would be surprised to learn that you'd be comfortable sharing with us?

Ricky Liorti: Ooh, that's a good one. I'm a pretty open book. Um, it's actually funny most people that see me online think I'm this, like cool, smooth talking, calm, collected social media guy. But, in reality, I'm not as cool as people think. I'm always just busy doing random things and random side quests. So, people always see me doing things like, oh, he lives a crazy, adventurous lifestyle. It's like, no, it's not that adventurous. It's just me being me and I love doing things.

Probably the biggest thing that I think people that don't know about me is I'm actually a pretty big softie. Now people obviously know, I wrote a book about it so cat's out of the bag on that one, I can't really use that as an answer anymore, but I'd probably say that one, yeah, I'm a big softie at heart.

Anastasia MacLean: Okay, well, that was just a perfect entree to your book, *Heartbreak Love: Guided Poetry Journal*. And that was released in October of 2024, what in the world inspired you to take that on?

Ricky Liorti: Um, yeah, it's funny, I get asked obviously every time someone talks to me about the book they say what inspired you? And people think it was a hard breakup. And well, yeah, hard breakups definitely help kickstart a lot of these things, um I journal, I journal a lot. I've journaled religiously since probably 2017, and I found it very therapeutic. In 2024, I started dating someone, and unfortunately, that didn't work out. So, I had all these thoughts about love. And one day I started thinking how nice would it be if I had someone to walk me through this process of love. What if I had someone to walk me through this journey? Whether it's about wanting to find love, finding love, or being heartbroken or just on the path to rebuilding yourself. So I said, "Okay, you know what? What if I wrote down all my thoughts and my vulnerable emotions and my most intimate moments, and I wrote them down and basically gave them to others as emotional support. To show people that, hey, you know, I'm not alone in this, there's someone out there going through exactly what I'm going through".

So, I ended up putting down all my thoughts into poems and I'm really proud of it. It's something that just, it kind of happened. It plays into the social media side of what I do and, you know, being open and honest and being vulnerable. Uh, so I think it was just a perfect fit. And when it released, I couldn't believe I did it. Like, I remember reading it for the first time to a group of people thinking, holy crap. Some of them I still read, I'm like I must have been in a different place because I can't believe I wrote that, how did those words come together like that? But yeah, overall very proud. Not something I saw myself doing but here we are, it's out, and I'm very pleased with the feedback I've gotten.

Anastasia MacLean: I just, when I think about it and the fact that you did it, I just wonder, was there ever a point that you went, maybe I'm shooting for the moon here, maybe I'm taking too big a risk here, maybe this is, even though I do all kinds of different things, maybe this is too out there.

Ricky Liorti: Uh, there was, there was many times. I remember when I started writing it down, and the ticking point that actually set me off to really decide I was going to do it was a random TikTok comment saying you should write a book. And I was like, "I think I am going to write a book". And funny enough, my publisher is also a Western grad, which again, a lot of my life revolves around these Western grads. Her name is Tabitha Rose from *Life to Paper*. She's a friend of mine, and we had chatted, because I knew a different author that she had worked with, so I just randomly reached out to her with my idea, and I kind of had you know, written up. And as I started writing them, I would read some of my poems on TikTok, and I wouldn't tell people they were mine. I'd be like, "Oh I saw, I saw a quote". And I remember the first one did, you know it didn't go viral but it performed pretty well. And then I read 2 or 3 more after and they tanked. And I'm like, "All right, maybe these aren't good, maybe I shouldn't write this". And I'll never forget when I finished it and I finally I said, I'm done and I was on my way to Syracuse with my mom and my dad for a pickleball tournament, and I read it to my mom and dad, and my dad's not, not an emotional guy and they were both in tears and I said, you know, that's, that's how I know I got something. It might not make a difference to a lot of people, might not be a New York Times bestseller, but if I can help some, some people going through something or maybe help people

share their emotions and be vulnerable with their partner or with themselves, then I think I'll make a difference and I think this will be a success.

Overall, very happy with it but yeah, to answer your question, there was, there was 5 or 6 times where I thought, what am I doing? I'm a construction worker who works in TikTok and plays pickleball. I'm not a poet, why am I doing this? Um, but like I said, I set a goal, once I have the goal set, I know it's done. So, I had the goal of writing 250 poems over the course of the summer, and I did it and, um, yeah it was done before I even knew it.

Anastasia MacLean: Everything is possible. Can you describe a career related, I'm going to call it a wrong turn, something that you did or didn't do that later on you went, oh, yeah, I should have done something else but that you learned the most from and are really grateful for?

Ricky Liorti: The app is one of the best things. When we, when we did the app, again I did it with George Boutsalis, a Western grad, and one of our other friends, David Benoit. We didn't know much about the tech space. We tried to read and we, we tried to learn as much as we possibly could but we're not tech people. So we didn't really have any idea what we were doing, but we just figured we were going to be going, and we're going to be doing this to the best of our abilities. Looking back, we could have, you know, tested it a little bit more before going and really investing all this money. I would have gone back and maybe slowed down, pump the brakes a little bit more. Uh, that being said, I don't think if we would have gone as fast as we did, we wouldn't have learned as much as we did. So, I think it was a really great experience, I'm really happy that we did it. Would it have been nicer to not lose the amount of money we lost? Yeah, that would have been very nice. But the lessons I learned in this app, I think, are part of the reasons I ended up being so successful, to an extent, in my current business. And, you know, I think working with my friends is also one of the hardest things. It's also one of the most rewarding and George is another great example. We worked together on this business that lost a lot of money. A year or two later, we're back to being business partners on this pickleball team. So there's times where we can get mad, a day later, we're back at it. And there's a mutual respect to where we can say, "Okay, you know, this is your area of expertise, what do you think?" "Or this is my area of expertise, you know, let me run with this". And I think that's why we've been successful on three out of the four businesses, I would say.

Anastasia MacLean: So, is there someone in particular you can think of, other than your business partner George, someone who's had a profound influence on you in your career journey, a mentor?

Ricky Liorti: Umm, someone who's played a big, a big role in all my business ventures and everything is my mother. And, um, my mother is my rock, she's like one of my best friends too. This woman has always told me to chase it, to go after it and never look back. If you're going to do something, do it 100% and don't second guess yourself. No matter if it's business, life, friendships, love, whatever it is, go after it with your entire heart and with everything you got and don't regret a single thing. And I think that's why I've been so prone to taking risks. Not only did my dad take it, you know, starting this business that he did, my mom took a risk by moving here and she's always pushed me to, to just go and do things.

Anastasia MacLean: So what kind of advice would you give to people who feel really stuck in their career lives right now and they want to get unstuck, but they don't know how or where to start?

Ricky Liorti: Um, I would tell them to find things you're passionate about. If you do those things really well, people will notice and maybe there's a business out of it, maybe there's not, but if there's not, at least you did something you love. And sometimes that's all you need to get out of a rut is to find something you love doing and make sure you're doing it. Maybe it's going for walks every day, maybe it's calling your loved ones, maybe it's writing poems, maybe it's gardening. Whatever people are into these days, find something you love and just go and do it. If you could do what you love every single day for a job, then you know there's that saying if

you love what you do, you'll never have to work a day in your life. Um, but even if you don't, at least you'll help clear your mind and you get to do something you love doing.

Anastasia MacLean: That's awesome. Ricky, thank you so much for being here and for sharing and being as open as I know you are. I appreciate you doing that with us.

Ricky Liorti: I appreciate you guys, thanks for having me and I wish you all the best of luck on this podcast. I know it's not easy, but just stay on it because every episode you're going to change somebody's life, I promise you.