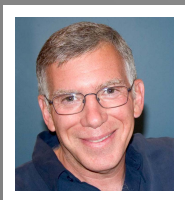




# Love's Lunacy

Farnoosh Brock in Conversation with Alan Stransman



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## Preface

The following conversation took place on May, 8, 2013, between Alan Stransman, author of the memoirs, "Don't let Your Dream Business Turn Into a Nightmare: A Cautionary Tale for Would-be Entrepreneurs" and "So, Why Have You Never Been Married?: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Lunacy", and Farnoosh Brock, author of a number of books, including, "The 8 Pillars of Motivation" and "Empower Your Writing: Skills for Today's Content Creator".

The conversation focuses on the motives for memoir writing and on the nature of love, especially the "lunacy" frequently associated with romantic love.

In addition to being published in this PDF version, the conversation can also heard on Farnoosh Brock's podcast, available at <http://www.prolificliving.com/itunes>

## The Interview

**Farnoosh:** Welcome to my conversation with one of the best writers I have ever read - and I read a lot - and also someone that I am delighted to call my friend, Alan Stransman. Alan Stransman is the author of two books, *Don't Let Your Dream Business Turn Into a Nightmare: A Cautionary Tale for Would-Be Entrepreneurs* and *So Why Have You Never Been Married?: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Lunacy*. I've read both of these books and cannot recommend them enough.

Alan began his professional career as a teacher of English and Film at the high school level and then he transitioned into broadcast TV production and he wrote, produced and directed a wide range of programs and series, including some award-winning documentaries. In 1999, Alan created a television series called *Spectacular Spas* and from there, he went on to found one of the first day spas in the world for men. It was called The Men's PowerSpa in downtown Toronto and that entrepreneurial venture was the basis of his book *Don't Let Your Dream Business Turn into a Nightmare*, which was adapted into a case study by the Ivey School of Business at the University of Western Ontario and has been taught in university entrepreneurship programs.

Alan's second book, "*So Why Have You Never Been Married?: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Lunacy*" is a funny, poignant and intimate account of his lifelong pursuit of love and tenderness and it's also an homage to the writers that helped shape his sensibility, such as D. H. Lawrence, Henry Miller, Philip Roth and William Wordsworth.

Alan is also a ghostwriter who helps you write your own memoirs and I hope to someday hire him to write mine. Welcome to the show, Alan. I'm so happy to have you here with me today.

**Alan:** Thank you, Farnoosh.

**Farnoosh:** I'm so excited to be talking to you. I have loved everything you have written and can't wait to read your next book. But as you know, I have read and loved your memoir, *So Why Have You Never Been Married?* And that's what inspired our talk today. The topic that I would like for us to explore is the mysterious, the elusive and sometimes inexplicable nature of romantic relationships. I hope we can explore some of the lunacy, as you call it - and I agree - and, maybe, try to unravel some of that together here.

**Alan:** The unraveling of it is setting the bar pretty high for everybody, not just for you and me, Farnoosh. But definitely it's a topic that I think everybody can relate to because in relationships - and I am always fascinated by this - people do things and behave in ways that they would never dream of behaving in any other circumstance in their life.

**Farnoosh:** Lunacy, as you like you call it.

**Alan:** There seems to be a license to be insane and crazy in relationships, that if you ever behaved like that in your professional life, you would be shown the door. So it's very, very interesting. That's just part of it but that's an interesting part of it.

**Farnoosh:** Oh, yeah. It's fascinating. I can't wait to get into this because I think all of us are guilty to some extent of the lunacy, but my first question for you is really a pretty simple one and that is why you even wrote your memoirs. I would love to know what your motive was for doing that.

**Alan:** Well, there's not just one answer to that. Generally, if I were to just speak about memoir and my interest in it, what's really interesting to me, Farnoosh, is that I never really thought of myself as a writer, oddly enough, because I studied literature. I have a Master's degree in English and I read the great writers and I never thought of myself as anyone that could conjure up the kind of imaginary images and scenes that the Philip Roths of the world can and the other great writers. But, while I am not a fiction writer, I seem to have a very acute memory for detail and I can recount incidents from my life with accuracy so that I never feel the need to embellish the truth, which I don't believe in doing anyway, as a memoir-writer. I also find real-life stories, if you will, more interesting than fiction.

When it came to my first book, which was *So Why Have You Never Been Married?: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Lunacy*, what happened is that at that time - I began the book in 1992 at the age of 40 - I was the only one of my friends that was still single. I had a group of buddies in my 30's and we used to all hang out and one by one these guys had all gotten married and I hadn't. So the guys used to call me up and say, "What's the latest? What's the latest?" And, I would tell them about my latest dating adventure and they would invariably howl as the stories were usually ridiculous.

**Farnoosh:** Did you write the book because you would have to repeat yourself and it got really tiresome?

**Alan:** Well, it was just that I heard the comment over and over again – "You should write a book."

**Farnoosh:** Oh, interesting.

**Alan:** I heard this comment over and over. "You should write a book about all this!" I had all these crazy blind dates, some of which are not even *in* my book. For example, I had a blind date which I thought at the time was – and may still be - the shortest blind date in recorded history. It literally lasted about 90 seconds. There was a woman who had a sister who was coming to Toronto to visit from Israel and somehow, somebody concocted a blind date with her.

To make a long story short, when I went to pick her up, she was sleeping. She had taken this very long flight and when she got into my car, she was still asleep and I kept asking her, "Where would you like to go?" and not getting any answer because there was a sleeping person in my car on a date. Finally, I said, "Well, how about if I just take you back home and you can go back to sleep?" and she seemed to nod some form approval to that suggestion, or, perhaps it was just wishful thinking on my part. But, literally, we drove about 100 yards and then turned around.

**Farnoosh:** That's funny. But would you say you wrote your memoirs because your friends were asking or people were generally asking or was it a deeper interest in relationships and looking back and reflecting on your own?

**Alan:** In 1992, I was working at a television station and it just so happened that I was assigned to a project and it was a very unusual project and it involved a woman who was a very high profile person, and she was working on this very high-profile roster of people who were going to be interviewed in this documentary and I was supposed to supervise the project and I was waiting for all of these issues to be worked out and I had nothing to do. I went into my office and I had nothing to do and I happened to have an office right beside a Vice-President – the company didn't know where to put me because I was kind of a one-man SWAT team - so they stuck me in this little office, and I didn't want this Vice-President to know that I was kind of twiddling my thumbs all day. So, I brought in a little computer that I had at home and I closed the door and I acted like I was very, very busy but I actually had nothing to do.

I started writing a book about my recent dating history, which at that time was supposed to be a funny, little book. At that time, all I really had were funny, little stories. But, the book took 20 years – well, it didn't take 20 years to write but it was written over ...

**Farnoosh:** The course of 20 years, right, right.

**Alan:** Yes, so by the time I went back to the book in 2009 and 2010, a lot had happened and I reframed all of the material from the perspective that I have now. So, it definitely changed from being a book that was intended as just a kind of funny little anecdotal book about goofy blind dates to something much more serious.

**Farnoosh:** And it is hilarious by the way. But did you have this compelling desire to tell your story or was it just the circumstances you were in and it all kind of just happened?

**Alan:** No, I think that for me – there's one side of yourself, especially with a book like this, in which you're revealing a lot of intimate things about yourself....

**Farnoosh:** Right.

**Alan:** And people would say, "You must be crazy to write a book like this," and you sort of *do* have to be a bit crazy to write a book like this, but on the other side, there really is a *very strong* desire to put your story out there. With my of my books, really - I definitely felt I wanted to tell the story. When you write a book – and I've got one of my books on my desk right now - when your story becomes a *physical object* that you can look at and you say, "You know what? My story is all in there. It's all in there"....

**Farnoosh:** Oh, I know. It's an entity. Right, yes.

**Alan:** It's an incredible feeling! There was a television show - I don't know whether it was *Cheers* or it was *Family Ties* - but there was a show that at the very end of the credit roll, the *very end*, there was a little graphic and then a little voice, a little child's voice that said, "I did that!"

**Farnoosh:** Yeah, I know the feeling.

**Alan:** "I did that." I love that.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah.

**Alan:** A grown man producing an NBC show and at the end, he just said, "I did that!" That is why you write a book.

**Farnoosh:** Oh, yeah. I know. That's good. That's wonderful. I know the feeling. I know the feeling.

**Alan:** And, to this day – and I know that this is going to sound strange but I'm probably the second biggest fan of my own writing. I think you're a bigger fan.

**Farnoosh:** I think I'm a little bigger. It's really good, really good.

**Alan:** But, there is a process of detachment, if you will, from your own work, whereby it feels as if it were written by someone else. I heard once that Spielberg will look at some of the films that he made early in his career and he wishes he could remake them. I don't have that experience when I read my books.



**Farnoosh:** Interesting.

**Alan:** I wouldn't change a comma. When I read my books - unless I were to find a typo - in which case, I would have a heart attack - but failing that, when I look at my books, I wouldn't change anything. To me, my books are "note-perfect" - which is not to say that they are the best books ever written, but for what I wanted to say at the time, they express what I was feeling and I wouldn't change them in any way.

**Farnoosh:** Okay. So that answers my question as to why you wrote your memoirs. I was hoping to hear that you had a compelling desire to write a story, which you obviously did. And, as I was reading your book, one unexpected reaction I had was how much it reminded me of the way I used to handle disagreements with my ex-boyfriends and also earlier in my marriage with my husband and that is, maybe, similar for other women. I don't know. But it's this reaction that's full of blame, this self-righteous attitude - I'm hurt, I'm screaming, I'm defensive - and feeling like the worst victim in the world over stupid stuff. It was pure lunacy. When I look back, I just want to laugh.

This is hardly the way that a man acts - at least in my experience - in the same situation, and you didn't act like that in the situations in your book. So, Alan, what would you say is the reason behind this crazy outrage in some of us women?

**Alan:** I will give you two answers to that question, Farnoosh. I will give you two answers, one of which may shock and possibly even nauseate you. I used to go to summer camp when I was in my teens. For three years, I was in the same cabin. I don't know why this happened, but I spent three summers in the same cabin, and this cabin overhung the lake. The cabins were built along the shoreline, and this cabin just happened to be built into the water.

**Farnoosh:** Nice.

**Alan:** It was. The cabin was built on an incline and the porch extended into the water. Now, this cabin was filled with teenage boys, 14, 15 years old. So what happens when you have a bunk full of 15-year-old guys and they wake up in the middle of the night and they have to find their way to the outhouse

with a flashlight and navigate their way up a hill? Forget about it! What do these guys do? Let's just say that they relieve themselves off the porch into the lake. Okay?

**Farnoosh:** Yeah, lovely. Okay.

**Alan:** Now, what happened is that over time, a gigantic, yellow gaseous cloud of uric acid formed that you could barely make your way through on a hot, humid day. But none of the guys could have *cared less*. They would just walk through it. They didn't care. Now this, to me, is the essence of men. *They don't care*.

*Men don't care*. They basically just *don't care*. You might find the occasional guy that's really into little "nitpicky" things but most guys who are in a relationship want a woman in their life. They want to *make love* with a woman. They want to be *in love*. But that's it! After that, they just want to be *left alone*. If they have to walk through clouds of uric vapors, they don't care. And women are not like that. And it makes women crazy to have to deal with men – most men, that is.

**Farnoosh:** That does make me mad.

**Alan:** Guys just don't care. Basically, guys are all the same. *Just leave me alone*. I want to watch the game. Okay? Yes, we just made love. Now, I'm putting the football game on. There's a certain basic simplicity to men's needs that is very different from women.

When I started the men's spa that you alluded to earlier, I told one of my friends who knew me in that period that I wanted the spa be like a "guy place". I said that I wanted the spa to have the feeling of camaraderie that we had at summer camp. "That's easy," he said. "When guys come in, just take their jackets and throw them on the floor. That's how you make guys feel at home. Take their jackets and throw them on the floor." Just throw them on the floor because that's what guys do. They don't care if their jacket is on the floor.

**Farnoosh:** OK, fair enough. "You don't care," is probably one thing that we women do say in our screaming sessions. But you know what? I think there is a

way to maybe balance it or find a compromise. Do you think the women should stop caring about the stupid stuff?

**Alan:** I don't think it *is* stupid stuff. It's just that men don't care about it and women do. On a serious note – and the reason I brought up the example of the teenage boys in the cabin – is that I truly believe that men and women are very seriously misaligned. They're *misaligned*. Men get along much better with other men. I have had male friends for over 30 or 40 years that I have never ever had an argument with, never had *any* kind of conflict with. I have a very good pal now that I walk with every morning with my dog after he drops his kids off at school. We have been walking together four or five times a week for almost four years, and we never have a scintilla of conflict or anger. But that's because men are very well aligned with each other. Men and women have a hard time getting through a weekend without fighting.

**Farnoosh:** But do you have disagreements with your male friends?

**Alan:** No.

**Farnoosh:** You don't have disagreements. Interesting.

**Alan:** No, we don't have *any* – but there's no misalignment. Of course, there is no sex, either. Men and women are very much *misaligned*. Their needs are very different. Their emotional responses are very different. A moment ago, I was telling you about the kind of "couldn't-give-a-damn attitude" that most men have towards a lot of things. But the other half of what I wanted to say about that is that what *really* causes the screaming fits in my view – and there are very complex theories that the Harville Hendrixes of the world have on this for which you have to go back to your relationship with your parents and all of that - but I'm a lay person, I'm not a psychologist or a psychiatrist, but what I say in my book is that, to me, it's all about *expectations*.

**Farnoosh:** Yes, I knew that was coming up.

**Alan:** It's the *expectations* and the *needs* that we have. When you're younger and you're more naïve, you think that people love you for who and what you are. There's a kind of naïve and fundamental assumption that you have when

you're going to go into a relationship that someone is going to love you because you have so much to give and so much to offer and that basically you're a very *lovable* person. All of the thousands and thousands of people that are on dating websites or that are just looking to meet someone, they all *fundamentally* – although they may not *articulate* this, but underneath it all - they have this feeling that they are someone that *someone else* is going to love. They don't think to themselves, people are going to meet me and be very disappointed with me, very frustrated with me. People just don't think that. You don't go into a marriage or a relationship thinking it's going to be war. It's going to be hell. But it *can* be and it very often is if you don't fulfill the other person's expectations. That's what causes a lot of the anger and conflict.

**Farnoosh:** That's exactly the expectation that you have – or women do. They expect a relationship to be an absolute paradise and these expectations are hidden. You alluded to them in your book. You had no idea that these expectations were going on in the minds of the women in your relationships, but there are expectations - and I know that. I relate to that. Then it becomes this thread where when you don't *understand* the expectation, because you didn't *know* about it, therefore you don't *respond* to it and then the woman gets mad, right?

**Alan:** There are two factors that I've cited among many, many theories. One is that women just do get upset about things that men don't get upset about. Now, again, that's a generalization. I mean there *are* men who are very, very neat and tidy but *on balance*, I don't think you would find women or young women, teenage girls, living in the kind of conditions that the teenage boys I described would live in. And it didn't bother them in the slightest. I think that women are just wired differently and, again, this is very much a generalization. I think men and women respond differently and one of the frustrations that I have had in all of the relationships that I've been in, and certainly the ones which I include in my book is the sense of, "Why is this a big deal? Why is this ruining our day?"

**Farnoosh:** Right.

**Alan:** And when somebody is constantly getting upset about things that you don't find to be a big deal, there's a *real conflict* there. That's one of the things I say in my book. And the other is - and now we're skipping right to the end of the book - but the real gist of my book is this - *if there were such a thing as love* - let me say again that to you, Farnoosh - *if there were such a thing as love ...*

**Farnoosh:** Which there is....

**Alan:** *If there were such a thing as love, what would that be or what should it be? What should love be? Love cannot be conditional upon the other person fulfilling your needs. That to me is not love. That might be "lurve" or "loave" as Woody Allen says. But it's not "love". I'm not going to dignify that with the word "love". Love ought to be more selfless than that.*

It ought to be an appreciation of, an admiration of, or just an acceptance of....

**Farnoosh:** Acceptance. It's just pure acceptance of the way things are and who you are. It doesn't mean you don't change or improve upon that.

**Alan:** Acceptance is *part* of love, but it is not the *whole story* of love. Somebody can sit beside me on a bus and I can accept or tolerate that person. They might be wearing a funny hat or have goofy-looking hair. Again, I can *tolerate* that person but that doesn't mean that I *love* that person. If you *love* a person - and this is the term I like to use - you have a kind of sympathetic response to the *struggling humanity* within that person. In other words, you understand their struggle and you accept it and you have a *deep empathy* for that struggle. It's the empathy that makes it love.

**Farnoosh:** Understanding it.

**Alan:** Understanding and sympathizing. That's what I call love.

**Farnoosh:** Let's talk about "lunacy". What do we do about that or do we not do anything?

**Alan:** There is a theory in the book *The 5 Love Languages*, Gary Chapman's book, that the phase of love, that *romantic intoxication* phase of love is, by

definition, short-lived and it lasts, on average, a couple of years. It is literally a form of lunacy. That's not metaphorical. It is a form of lunacy, according to Chapman.

**Farnoosh:** Okay.

**Alan:** Therefore you are not in your right mind and you are not perceiving things accurately when you are "in love".

**Farnoosh:** Oh, I see. You're not really seeing reality for what it is. You are putting this person in a different place.

**Alan:** There are different forms of derangement and being "in love" is one of them, according to Chapman. In his book, he explains it by saying that there is, on average, a two-year period during which you're in a somewhat altered state and your perception of the other is altered and is idealized and romanticized.

The friend that I referred to earlier that I walk with has a female friend and he has known her for a number of years and they're both divorced and they've kind of flirted with the possibility of getting romantically involved and they have backed away from it. He had dinner with her not too long ago, and asked her how she was doing. Oh, she's *in love*, she said. She met a man about a month ago and now they're in love. The funny thing is that I'm now at a stage in my life where that made me laugh. At an earlier stage of life I would have said, "Oh how nice," but now I see the silliness of that because they don't know each other well enough yet to really love each other.

**Farnoosh:** Really? So you've become cynical and jaded towards that falling in love stage.

**Alan:** I don't know that I want to say "cynical" because to be cynical is to say that inevitably everything works out badly. I don't know that it *has* to work out badly. But I also don't think that you should say that you're in love with someone that you have known for a month. What happens in life is that people reveal themselves over time. That is the *whole process* of life – things being revealed over time. One of the things that we see every single day,

Farnoosh, is that we really don't know who another person is. I actually have CNN on in the background right now, with this horrific story of this horrible, horrible incident in which these young women were held captive and everybody who knew the guy who abducted them and held them captive thought he was a nice guy. Now, that is a very extreme example, of course, but people can have many dimensions and it takes time for them to be revealed.

**Farnoosh:** Of course. You could find examples like that and then never trust anyone. You're right. But what you said about slowly revealing ourselves - I feel that if we have to put up this fake front in order to attract the other person and fall in love with them, and then eventually the true self comes out anyway - you can only resist it so much.

That's when the problems begin – at the end of your book, you said how you only wanted whoever was your ideal at the time, to love you for the way you are, for the person that you are. So, maybe it's at the beginning when we meet someone and we feel pressured to be someone else in order to attract them - that's where the problem starts.

**Alan:** Well, it's double-edged because not only are you trying to live up to another person's ideal that you're sort of guessing at, but you are also putting your best foot and trying not to reveal the unattractive aspects of your own personality. I always get a little bit of a kick out of this - you will be walking down the street and you will see a couple bickering with each other ...

**Farnoosh:** Right, right. It's very unattractive.

**Alan:** You will see that and you will think, "Well, this is *not* a couple on their first date." This is not a blind date because on a blind date or a first date, people don't show that side of their nature. They only show that side of their personality over time.

**Farnoosh:** You're right.

**Alan:** Alec Baldwin who was married *once* – he has subsequently remarried, but at the time, he had only had one marriage and he was being interviewed by Larry King, who has been married nine times and twice I think to the same

woman or something like that -“Alec,” King says to him, “What happens? Where does it go wrong?” And Baldwin says to him, “You’re asking *me*? You’ve been married nine times. I’ve been married once. And you’re asking me what goes wrong?” But then Baldwin said something interesting. “When you get married,” he said, “you meet the other person’s monster. You meet their monster.”

**Farnoosh:** But what if you could both tame each other’s monster?

**Alan:** Perhaps, but first you have to recognize the monster and say, “Wow! That’s a monster.”

**Farnoosh:** Yeah.

**Alan:** Forget about *taming* it. Taming is further down the road. To tame that monster, the first step is to go, “Wow! There’s a monster here. I didn’t know there was a monster here.” And then to see how bad *is* this monster. Now there are some *bad* monsters. There are some *really, really bad* monsters. Like this woman who was married to this cretin who blew people’s limbs off in Boston. She didn’t want anything to do with the body of her ex-husband. You take it! Send it away! Dump it in the ocean! I don’t care! Why? Because her husband turned out to be a terrible, terrible monster – she couldn’t have known that when she married him but once she found out she didn’t want anything to do with him.

**Farnoosh:** Right.

**Alan:** And there was no accepting *his* monster ...

**Farnoosh:** Yes, but that’s totally exceptional. Let’s say normal people, right? Where we have our normal everyday “modern world” problems.

**Alan:** I’m just saying you have got to look at the other person’s monster and you have got to ask, “Can I live with this monster? There is a monster here. How bad is this monster?”



Now, not everybody *has* a monster, but if you do and if you're with somebody that will not accept that you have a monster, you have a problem. Ironically enough, I came from a household where my dad was a very mild-mannered guy. I described him at some length in my book. I never saw his monster. I never heard him raise his voice. I lived under the same roof as my father for - I don't know - 25 years or something like that.

He never used profanity. He was a gentleman all the way down the line. So I don't think that everyone has a monster. Not *everyone* - but some people do. Most people - when they're cutting the wedding cake, and dancing to "Feelings" at the wedding - most people are not aware that they just married a monster. Some people might have the maturity or know each other well enough to realize that there really *is* something to that marriage vow about "for better or for worse", but not many.

**Farnoosh:** But I don't think of it as you have a side that may be monstrous. There's always exceptions. There are always crazy people but we're talking in the general sense. There is a *side* - that's the lunacy. That's the monster. But do you not believe that change is possible and that love can actually conquer and that two people can come to a higher level where they meet? The man and woman, they meet each other with some higher level of understanding.

**Alan:** I totally believe that that is possible. I mean *totally*. There's a great line from a James Taylor song where he says, "I reckon I must be just an old softie, but I still believe in love." That's why I don't like the term "cynical" - that term just doesn't resonate with me. I'm not saying it's impossible for men and women to get along. It's just difficult and rare and it takes work.

**Farnoosh:** Good.

**Alan:** I totally believe in love but I also think you have to really be *accepting* of another person. Having said that, I don't believe that "anything goes". I don't believe in "anything goes". I'm not a "let-it-all-hang-out" kind of person.

**Farnoosh:** Oh, can you explain that? Can you give me examples?

**Alan:** One of my favorite lines in all of life comes from the movie *African Queen* in which Humphrey Bogart and Katharine Hepburn are stuck in a boat going down the Amazon or whatever it is.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah.

**Alan:** And you've got this "rough-around-the-edges" uncouth boor with this very prim and proper lady and that's the dynamic there – the most unlikely of romantic partners. And the Humphrey Bogart character is drinking and belching and whatever and the dignified Katharine Hepburn upbraids him for it and the Bogart character says, "Well, it's just human nature" or something to that effect. He's defending his behavior by saying that it's human nature and she says to him, "Human nature is what we were put on earth to rise above." That statement resonates with me. I don't believe that you just let it all hang out in life or in relationships.

**Farnoosh:** I see.

**Alan:** If you just let it all hang out, it can be very hard on other people – now some people can do it. I'm not one of them. I don't know what my monster would be like if I ever gave the monster the full run of the house.

**Farnoosh:** I see. Okay. I see it now.

**Alan:** I wouldn't want to be in the house with my *own* monster running amuck, let alone subject another person to it. I think we all have a responsibility to keep the negative elements in our personality in check.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah.

**Alan:** I certainly wouldn't want to subject somebody else to my monster. When I say "monster" – I mean behaving badly, being angry. I just don't believe in bad behavior. I just don't believe that you have license with another person to yell at them or be abusive.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah, I love that.

**Alan:** I don't think that just because you know a person or you have intimacy with a person, you're married to a person, that you have a license....

**Farnoosh:** It doesn't give you permission. You're right. You're right. And there has to be a certain code of conduct even in an intimate relationship or a marriage.

**Alan:** When I see couples that are critical and abusive with each other - that is so common, Farnoosh, but it's not acceptable to me.

**Farnoosh:** You're right.

**Alan:** You have to look at another person and say, "This is a free, proud person that is not put on this earth to live up to my expectations."

When I was younger, as I was referring to earlier in our conversation, with the blind date story, and I used to go on a blind date - I'm talking now about my early 20s - and if the girl wasn't attractive or she wasn't my type, I would think, "Well, who set me up on this terrible date?"

I thought that this person was *supposed* to meet my expectations.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah, the self-righteous feelings that I talked about, right?

**Alan:** It's absurd. I wasn't mature enough then to realize that this is a person who only has to live up to her *own* expectations - and only if she chooses to do that!. Let her live up to her own expectations if she wants to. I am at a stage of my life now at which I do not wish to live up to anyone else's expectations of me because it has been such a battle just trying to live up to my *own* expectations. I'm busy enough with them. I don't need anyone else's expectations of me to worry about.

**Farnoosh:** Right.

**Alan:** Please, don't give me *your* expectations of me because I *guarantee* you I can't live up to them. I'm still working on my *own* expectations of myself.

**Farnoosh:** Right, and that's all we can do. I mean it takes a lot of work and I've done a lot of work on myself and I realized that the only thing we can control is ourselves. Then you start to see that yeah, you only have yourself, your own expectations. You cannot control the other person and when you let go of that obsessive control which I think is the core of what at least me as a woman – I have driven off of that – you see this person, your partner actually do the very thing that you cared about without you having to just nag them and hassle them.

But they have to come to that place on their own. It takes a lot of, I guess, maturity and time and that's the problem because we get into relationships when we're in our 20s or earlier and we don't know that. Then we perpetuate those bad habits that we pick up. And it goes on and on.

So we have talked a lot about the lunacy and we could probably go on, but I do want to talk a little bit about the loss. You mentioned in your book there were three major losses, in a way. It depends on how you look at them right now. That's really my question. You had three significant relationships that all came to closure.

I was sad when I was reading that as a reader when they did come to closure because it seemed to me that you really cared about each of these women. So my question for you is, "When you look at that, do you feel that this was all how it was supposed to play out and you're at peace or do you feel maybe there was something you could have done or done or said or whatever that would have changed that experience?"

**Alan:** Well, I will answer your second question first.

**Farnoosh:** Sure.

**Alan:** Do I think that there was something I could have done? One of the difficult things about love and this gets back to your earlier question about why I wrote my book. I do want to say this because I think it's interesting. Love is internal. I mean feelings are internal. Now they do *manifest* but there can also be a disconnection as well. One of the real reasons that I wanted to write

my book, Farnoosh, was that I wanted to write about who I was when I was in love.

There's a wonderful line from a poem by a poet whose name is Pier Giorgio Di Cicco that I read many years ago, and it has always stayed with me. The line is, "Love gentled us to many things." "Love gentled us to many things." That's what love does to me. It makes me *gentler*. It brings out a *gentle* side to my nature and I wanted to write about that. At the beginning of the interview, you gave a little bio of me - and that's my bio sounds like - I worked at such and such a place, I produced such and such a show, I wrote such and such a book.

But that's not who I *was* on this planet. I was the man who loved such and such a woman in such and such a way. My bio is what was going on *on the outside*. My memoir is about what was going on *on the inside* - which was to me, far more important, but nobody could see it. People saw me as a guy walking around the halls at CFTO, working on different television shows - but that was just on the outside.

On the inside, I had a poem running through my brain because I felt deeply for this woman. That's as much a part of my biography as anything else, if not more so.

**Farnoosh:** Absolutely, absolutely. But when you look back, when you look back at those relationships, what do they represent? When I ask, "Would you have done something differently?" I don't mean something that would have - I mean we can always do something differently, of course. But is it something that you wish you had done, that would have aligned to who you were or did you just play it out to where it was who you are and then it led you to the closures that you experienced?

**Alan:** Well, in my own case, there's no question that I was in love with the women that I was in love with. So, it wasn't for lack of love, although, perhaps, not the right kind of love. I know people who say that they've never been in love. That good friend I referred to earlier? He would tell you - and he tells me whenever we discuss this which is virtually every day - that he has never experienced love. He does not know what love is.

He's profoundly shaken by that recognition and I would certainly not say that of myself. I would say about the women that I write about in my book - the serious love relationships - that I loved them all as much as I *could* love them. There's another line of poetry that comes to mind from a poem by Al Purdy in which he says "Love is an absolute like death is." I believe that. I believe that love *is* an absolute. So if you were to say to me, "Did I love this woman more than that woman?" I would say, no. I loved all of the women I loved in the way that I love a woman, which is as an *absolute*.

So how do I feel? I feel their loss deeply. That is why the inscription to the book is taken from "The Wasteland" – "These fragments I shore against my ruins."

That's the whole book right there. This is what's left - fragments. And the book, for all of its 428 pages, really is just fragments of the love I experienced. But, worth preserving, at least for me.

**Farnoosh:** So how would you answer the question then of why you've never been married?"

**Alan:** Because the love that I had in my heart was not enough to overcome behavioral or temperamental factors or other things that come into play. If a woman were to say to me, "I just want a man who has deep feelings. Deep feelings are all I want. I don't care if he's a little selfish or he's preoccupied or he does this or he does that. I just want a man with deep feelings," I would say, well, I just put out a 428-page document of *my* deep feelings. If you can find another man who can match that – then go ahead. But I did it. Okay?

I put a record out there that said this is what I felt. Now, am I an *easy* guy to be in a relationship with? I don't know. Is there a litany of complaints against me? I guess so. But at least I put out a document that said, "Hey, this is my love letter to you. This is how I felt about you and this is why I wrote this book because of what we had and what we lost."

**Farnoosh:** And it wasn't enough. I think that really positions it well because in all of the relationships, it seemed it just wasn't enough, whatever the situation. We're not pointing fingers or blaming or anything. It just wasn't enough and ...

**Alan:** No, it wasn't enough.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah.

**Alan:** Absolutely. That's exactly right. It wasn't enough.

**Farnoosh:** We've been mentioning a lot of poems. There is a Wallace Stevens poem at the very end of the book called "The Emperor of Ice Cream" in which he talks about the fact that people do not love what is. They love what seems and there is a line from the poem, "Let be be the finale of seem." I just love that.

You said in your book, "If we loved each other for who we really are, why would love end?" But it seems that – I mean that's really what I experienced in each of the stories that you mentioned and I think we maybe make up stuff in our head in the course of a relationship and then realize we get away from love. We get away from what really is there, who we are and that's enough. That's a sad message, I think. I think we need to go back to that and find harmony right there where we had it maybe at the beginning, when we were falling in love.

**Alan:** Well, it's very challenging Farnoosh, to really love a person, to be a person who is capable of loving another person for who and what they are. It's a two-way street. That person also has to be *worthy* of being loved and I *totally* believe in that. I don't think that you just *love* a person for no reason - we could talk a lot about what makes a person worthy of love and it's not necessarily the big car or the big job but that's a discussion for another day.

**Farnoosh:** Of course. You're absolutely right.

**Alan:** There are criteria. There are definitely criteria. To love a person for really who they are – and again, to see in them – what I would say to you is that in the moments when I disappointed my girlfriends, when I failed to live up to their expectations, those were probably the times at which they were needy but so was I because I always wanted to be better person. My life is always about wanting to be better than I am. I don't have a bone in my body that's

complacent and self-accepting. So that's my own struggle. I wish that I could get out of my own way more in life. I wish I could be better at that.

But in those failings - rather than getting angry at me for those failings, if someone were able to be more empathetic – but that is the actual flash point where the other person's needs conflict with your weaknesses and that's when things blow up.

**Farnoosh:** Absolutely, absolutely. I think to meet those weaknesses with understanding can be the beginning of healing. It has been a point of tension for me in the past, just coming back to the love. It's a lot of work and it's definitely to me still a mystery. But somehow my mystery is working for now, but it's always a work in progress.

**Alan:** It takes two to tango.

**Farnoosh:** It takes two to tango, exactly, exactly. One of favorite dances. So in these conversations that I bring to our show *The Daily Interaction*, Alan, I generally wrap with giving something actionable to my listeners. And I'm wondering from this conversation and this topic, if you were to give them something they could do to navigate these waters of romance more effortlessly maybe, what would you say?

**Alan:** I would say that where problems begin in relationships, really, is in neediness and unrealistic expectations. To whatever extent we can be aware of our own neediness, our own expectations of another and be more accepting of another person as just a kind of "wonder beast" to borrow a phrase from D. H. Lawrence - in other words, if we can see the other person as someone who delights and surprises us and amuses us and touches us in a way that is *not* related to our need for self-esteem or whatever else - the closer we can get to the model of loving the other person for who and what they are as opposed to *what they give to us*, the better.

**Farnoosh:** Yeah, I love that. I love that. I think that summarizes a lot of what we talked about and maybe we can put it into practice in our relationships.



Thank you, Alan, so much for being here and sharing your insights and just being so open about the love, loss and lunacy of relationships with us today.

**Alan:** My pleasure, Farnoosh.

**Books by Alan Stransman**

[Don't Let Your Dream Business Turn Into a Nightmare: A Cautionary Tale for Would-Be Entrepreneurs](#)

[So, Why Have You Never Been Married?: A Memoir of Love, Loss and Lunacy](#)

**Books by Farnoosh Brock**

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