



## Rants & Randomness with Luvvie Ajayi Jones

Go Your Own Way (with Brandon Stanton) - Episode 49

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Yo, my PEOPLE! Welcome to Rants and Randomness. I'm your host Luvvie Ajayi Jones, New York Times bestselling author, speaker and professional troublemaker, and I'm here to share dope conversations that will give you something to think about, help you smile and feel empowered to do what you feel compelled to do. So, let's get into it.

I'm so excited for you to hear this conversation. Today, I'm talking to the amazing [Brandon Stanton](#). He's the creator behind the popular photo storytelling platform [Humans of New York](#). After being fired from his job as a bond trader in Chicago, Brandon moved to New York City to create a photographic census of the city.

The blog started in 2010, features portraits of people in New York City, along with conversations of the people he photographs. In 2014, Brandon took the blog abroad featuring stories from all over the world. And he was invited to the Oval Office to photograph and interview President Barack Obama in 2015. He's the author of two number one New York Times bestselling books, [Humans of New York](#), and [Humans of New York: Stories](#), and his latest book, [Humans](#).

As of this recording, Brandon is finishing up a week of sharing [Tattletales from Tanqueray a series of stories and images from my queen Stephanie, aka Lady Tanqueray](#). We're talking about all that series, we're talking about Brandon his story, how he started doing this work. And when he decided to use this platform in this way. During our conversation, we cover what he considers a stroke of luck that really kicked off Humans of New York to be what it is now. We cover how him being lost in his early 20s actually led him to this place. And honestly, we talked about Stephanie, and what she's going through how she's been receiving all the love everyone's been giving. Honestly, this conversation is one of my favorites that I've ever had on this podcast. So you're in for a treat, jump in!

Before we jump into the interview, I want to make sure the Rants fam knows that my new book, [PROFESSIONAL TROUBLEMAKER: The Fear-Fighter Manual](#) comes out March 2, 2021 and is available for pre-order right now!

I wrote this book because everything great in my life has come as a result of me choosing to be a professional troublemaker. From feeling afraid and choosing to do the scary thing anyway. We don't have to call ourselves fearless, we need to learn to fight the fear and imposter syndrome by feeling it and using it as fuel to become better versions of ourselves. The things I'm talking about in this book will take you from being a fear-hider to a fear-fighter, and heaven knows we got a lot of things that bring up fear right now. So to order it, go to [professionaltroublemakerbook.com](http://professionaltroublemakerbook.com) to learn more and

grab the links to pre-order or order it from wherever you get books. I'm so excited for you to read this book. It's lit.

## Conversation with Brandon Stanton

[00:02:59]

**LUVVIE** Brandon. This is actually epic. Like. This is like, epic shit. I'm like, Oh my God, I cannot believe I'm interviewing you.

**BRANDON** Oh, thank you. I'm glad to be here. It's good to see you.

**LUVVIE** Yeah, when I asked...

**BRANDON** I know. We've been talking about doing this for a while. And it's the perfect time, right?

**LUVVIE** Is the yo like, Can I you say this last week has been insane.

**BRANDON** For insane for a lot of reasons. Uh, you know, I'm glad that I'm glad that the the Tanqueray story is a good insanity. There's been a lot of good insanity and a lot of bad insanity going on as well in this world, so I'm glad that Tanqueray could provide a little bit of reprieve this week. I think everybody needed it.

**LUVVIE** Everybody needed it. In this moment. We've been cheering along. It's like a whole thing. But this interviews you've actually beyond her like, I think [Tanqueray](#) is kind of like the best of Humans of New York in in how it presents, but I've actually been following you since I remember before you had, I think you had like 700,000 followers on Facebook.

**BRANDON** Yeah. So, that was pretty early.

**LUVVIE** That I'm like, I remember because

**BRANDON** That sounds like a huge number. But it was early. Yeah,

**LUVVIE** That that's pretty early. So I've actually been following this work for a minute. So on rants, I like to always drill in like even beyond the work of it all. Like I'm always fascinated to find out how the whole thing happened because people see your 11 million Instagram followers, and they see, you know, I don't even know how many you got on Facebook right now.

**BRANDON** But, um, I think it's 18 is it's, I guess when you get this, when you get up to a certain level, the the individual numbers kind of become meaningless. It's a lot of people. It's a lot of people.

**LUVVIE** It's a lot of people following you. So, I'm curious, like, what did you want to be when you were growing up?

**BRANDON** What did I want to be when I grew up, like the first memory I have is wanting to be a marine biologist. I liked going when we ever we went to the beach, I like to kind of catching fish and shells. And I found out that there was an occupation where you could just kind of study animal life, or marine life. And so that was my first thing. But that was my very young one.

As I got older, I don't know, like, I think, you know, part of my arc and I think the arc of so many people, you know, in their late teens, early 20s, I didn't know what I wanted to do. And, you know, I felt, I felt like it was a very creative person. You know, I wanted to do something creative. It's very hard. This was before social media too,

**LUVVIE** Right.

**BRANDON** Um, so I think maybe social media and the success of you know, things like Humans in New York, things like your podcast and your book and your work, you know, have kind of given a clearer path for people to follow if they want to do something creative.

But you know, in the early 2000s, late 90s, you know, when you feel like a creative person and you're looking at the pathways in front of you - go to college, get this degree, you know, go to go get this job, this entry level job work your way up to that, you know, it's like it's it was kind of, you know, a tough for a creative soul to, to kind of find their place and to know exactly what to do. I was in school all day I was studying, you know, these different subjects that I didn't see how they really applied to the things that I wanted to do in life. Um, I was just confused. I really didn't know um, it was kind of a dark time in my late teens, early 20s. A lot of drug use. I'm just, yeah, a lot of not feeling like I fit in and not knowing what I wanted to do.

**LUVVIE** And what, Where did you go to school?

**BRANDON** So I went to the University of Georgia, flunked out, went to Georgia Perimeter Community College, which probably I got, you know, that I always say, like, you know, I think my best education came from there. Um, did well there went back to the University of Georgia, graduated from there. Um, so

**LUVVIE** What, what major? What degree?

**BRANDON** History. And I still love history. So, yeah, history is a passion. When I first went to the University of Georgia, I was setting business again, I didn't really know what to do, it's just kind of being like, shuffled along the path of like, okay, I don't know what I do might as well get some security in my life. Um, and then when I flunked out, I was like, Okay, I made such bad grades in college. Like, if I go back now, like, I just want to graduate, so I might as well pick something that I'm really passionate about. And I really enjoyed reading history at the time. So that's what I chose.

**LUVVIE** I think there is a, there's something that a lot of successful people have in common is, a lot of us did shitty in college sometimes like..

**BRANDON** I mean, here's why I mean, there, it's because I think it's if you want to build something, you know, and you want to kind of go out, go your own way, and you know, do something outside the box. There's nothing more anathema to that, than sitting in class, checking boxes going

down this checklist of assignments and things that you have to do. And, you know, the caste of mind that will later become an entrepreneur, or somebody who builds their own thing is naturally going to rebel against that very, very hard.

**LUVVIE** Yeah.

**BRANDON** Because you want to, you want to be out, putting things together and constructing something, you know, and creating something. And having every slot of your day and every slot of time filled up with a list of tasks that you have to accomplish is naturally going to cause friction with that caste of mind. And I think that's probably why, you know, people who later on go, go into a field or profession, that's creative, later on build something, or organize something, um, do so poorly in college, it's just because the caste of mind that is required to take a huge risk and face of a monstrous amount of uncertainty, yeah, is naturally not going to do well, in an environment where everything's structured for it.

**LUVVIE** I think the best things that we learn are outside of school, like the best education, like I think, for me college was actually more about the connections that I made and who I became because of the experience.

**BRANDON** Yeah, exactly.

**LUVVIE** Not necessarily, because of the classes that I took,

**BRANDON** Right, right, right.

**LUVVIE** I was supposed to be a psychologist. Clearly, that didn't happen.

**BRANDON** You know, I'm sure there's elements of that in what you do. But you know I, I and like, Well, for me, it's, yeah, it's like, I mean, I still got a lot of my education from books, um, that you know, that. So you know, outside of college definitely and I'm sure that in your, in your framing of it is the same way - didn't mean outside of books for me, um, you know, when the first time I was going through school, um, I, I viewed all kinds of books, if you book learning, you know, in as far as, like textbooks and stuff, as something that was kind of below me, and in that I didn't want to just read what other people told me to read, I didn't want to study and memorize facts. So I could regurgitate A, B and C on the test. So I kind of rebelled against books as a, and I mean, with nonfiction books, I enjoyed a novel like everybody, um, as a way of educating myself.

And then when I dropped out of college, um, and then went to Perimeter College, in Georgia Perimeter College, a community college, I was surrounded by people who maybe they had children at a young age, maybe they were from families of immigrants, and they were less privileged. And for them, education wasn't this rite of passage that you got shuffled along, um, you know, fulfilling the wishes of your parents like, education was something that they were clawing for, and striving for, in order to better their lives.

And so being in this environment really reframed my, my view of education. And education is something outside of school. It is a thing unto itself. And during that time period, I became very dedicated to educating myself. But the difference being the books that I read, and the things

that I studied, were going to come from my own volition, they were going to be something that I, I pursued, based on my own itinerary, my own agenda. That the books that I chose to read were going to be based on my own curiosities. Um, and then once I made that pivot, I started reading a lot. Um, I was I read 100 pages a day for years. Um, so education became very important to me. Um, but it was education based on my own syllabus, my own volition, and not top down structured education.

**LUVVIE** That makes a lot of sense. So when you graduated, what was your next move?

**BRANDON** So, I graduated with a history degree, um, and it didn't solve a whole lot of my underlying problems of again, feeling like a creative person, wanting to do something creative. You know, at that time in college, I was attempting to make a documentary - the worst documentary anyone's ever made. I borrowed a camera from my friend, I didn't even know anything about audio, you'll see you've got these nice headphones with these, with this microphone. I don't even I still, you know, I'm still not not very efficient with audio clearly.

But I, but I just love shooting, you know, um, and it really kind of echoes what later came in humans from New York, I just borrowed my friend's camera, I filmed like, 1000 hours, I'm like, Oh, this is great. Look at this tree. I'll figure out how to get this into my movie. It's beautiful. You know what I mean? And I even remember, because I started out, I making the documentary on student athletes, like I chose, like three very different, um, one of them was the most famous player on our football team. The other was a 14 year old, um, prodigy golfer, and the other was a, he wasn't a student, he worked at the school, he was this 80 year old man, probably younger than that, at the time, he's probably about a 70 year old man. And he would go in, he's kind of a legend, he would go into the gym every single day, wearing - he looked like Albert Einstein, he wore these goggles, and he wore the same blue sweatshirt every single day. And he shot basketballs like this, he would, he would, he would take one hand behind his head and throw it over there like that. And he was a legend because this man could sink 100 3-point shots in a row, he would just like glow. And they always went in his name is Tom, he worked in the math library.

So I profiled these three different athletes and I was interviewing them - horrible interviews, horrible audio. And to kind of figure out what it was that they all had in common that kind of made them excellent. And nothing ever came of that. But it did get the camera in my hand, get me filming, and in love with them. And then I even kind of went off in echoes what would later become Humans in New York, I even kind of started you know, stopping random people on the street and interviewing them and be like, oh, maybe I can figure this into my movie later. You know, maybe I can just figure this...I was just filming everything.

And so I graduated, and I got this bucket full of horrible footage I still have with me. Um, and I but still like, no, you know, getting social media didn't exist, the path for an artist was less clear, um, and more structured. In the same way that I rebelled against structure before, you know, you had to go through a system, whether that's the music industry system, or the Hollywood system. To be an artist, you had to be ordained and chosen and curated and picked by tastemakers, who chose you out of MFA programs. You know, it was it like, the word art sounded glamorous, but the pathway to art wasn't much more independently driven or, or it didn't allow for as much, you know, freedom as it does today.

And so I felt stuck. I had a call from a friend that he - actually just saw him yesterday, still a very good friend of mine - who had studied finance his entire life. Um, and, you know, he said, I was telling him, I didn't really know what to do. And he goes, Well, you know, you don't have a finance degree. But I think he would be an excellent bond trader, that's what he was doing at the time. And if you want, I can get you an interview, and not knowing what I was going to do. I said, Okay, that's great. Um, so I went, I did the interview.

Beforehand, remember, I said I was very into education at that time, I read every book on the market I possibly could. So by the time I went into the interview - because I had a history degree.

**LUVVIE** Right.

**BRANDON** But I went in that interview, I'd read like 100 books, everything I could find, just so I was ready. got that job. I did it for about two years. And this is 2008. And it was very exciting. It was very high pressure, high stakes and interesting, almost too interesting. I was like, obsessed with it in an unhealthy way. And I did that for about two years, 2008 happened, which was the financial crisis, ended up getting fired. Um, and then I kind of had this moment where I kind of looked at my path and said, okay, you know, three years ago, you were trying to make a film - wanted to do something creative. Then for the past two years, you've been really pursuing money for money's sake. You know, I had, I had this narrative in my head, oh, I'm going to make my money first. And then I'm going to pivot. I'm going to do something creative. You know, what I'm doing now isn't who I am. What I'm doing now is just to get some security to get some firm footing under my feet so that I can later on be who I am.

**LUVVIE** Right.

**BRANDON** But, but I've done this for two years, and all I've been thinking about is the process of making money and that's what trading is. it's you know, you're, you're we were trading bonds. So you're trading money to make money. It's thinking about money all day long. And, you know, two years have gone by, and I didn't really have anything to show for it. I got fired, I wasn't performing well.

And, you know, at that point, I made the decision that I'm just going to stop thinking about money and making money and just focus on my time. That I'm going to, instead of trying to make so much money that I owned all my time, I was, you know, I was going to try to make just enough money to where I could do what I wanted to do all day long. And at the time, that was photography. I had bought a camera to relieve the stress of work, because it was going so poorly. I've only been photographing for a few months, but I loved it. And you know, it kind of felt like the same way I did in college - I just loved I loved being out and interacting with the world. There's like this physical energy exchange, and I've missed that during COVID. You know what I mean? Because, I'm doing I'm doing the remote interviews, which are great. And, in many ways, the most popular thing I've ever done. But I do miss the being out on the street and interacting with the world and exchanging energy, not only with other people, but with the world. It was such a satisfying thing to do. You know what I mean? Not what came out of it, not the money or the audience that came out of it, the act itself was very satisfying, very nourishing, and I wanted to replicate it. I just, I want to do this all day long. And so I made the decision, I am just going to figure out how to structure my lives where I could photograph all day long. And

that's what Humans in New York wants. It was my very amateurish, very naive, very idealistic idea of how I was going to photograph all day long, I was going to create some big project that people are going to be interested in and people are going to pay attention to, and I don't know how it's going to make money. I have no idea. Maybe there will be an article about it somewhere, and then people will notice it, and I can sell my photos. It wasn't very fleshed out.

**LUVVIE** What year was this?

**BRANDON** 2010

**LUVVIE** How old were you?

**BRANDON** 26

**LUVVIE** Wow.

**BRANDON** Yeah - you know, we're coming up on the 10 year anniversary. It's a time of reflection. November 4 2010, was when I moved to New York full time. And I mean, one of the interesting things I mean, there's a couple interesting things about Humans of New York, is that when I decided to do it full time, I had very little photography experience. And I'd never been to New York before.

You know, I saw, I was at the age of 26. I saw New York City for the first time, two months before I moved there. And remember, at the time I was, I was kind of traveling around photographing. And I had kind of gotten into and started focusing on taking photos of people. Because I'm, again, I'm trying to figure out how I can structure my life to where I can photograph all day long.

**LUVVIE** Yeah.

**BRANDON** And so I'm like, What can I do? What What can I do? That's interesting, what can I do that's different? And I started out like every photographer, urban decay, nature shots, graffiti, you know what I mean? And then I started taking pictures of people - candid shots, which were a little bit more unique and a little bit more interesting. And then I, you know, I was so I'm so excited by these, that I, I started stopping people, really interesting people and asking them if I could take their photos and taking portraits of them. And I remember I posted one of them on Facebook. I'm just posting them on my personal Facebook account at this time.

**LUVVIE** Yeah.

**BRANDON** And a buddy, I remember a photographer friend, friend of mine, wrote, "Oh, that's a beautiful street portrait." And I said "Street portraits? Oh! Street portraits are a thing. I'm gonna, I'm gonna make street...That's who I am. I'm, that's what I do. I make street portraits."

And so from that moment on, I just started stopping people on the street asking for their photos, again, just posted it on my personal profile, didn't really have a plan, other than

photographing all day long, got to New York City. Um, and there's this island called Manhattan. That is so packed with people that you can't walk 10 feet without walking into someone.

**LUVVIE** Oh my God. Yes.

**BRANDON** And you don't need a car because I was broke. You can walk in anywhere. And I was like, okay, you know, if there's any place and there's all types of people, every type of person in the world is in Manhattan, and you know, and I say, Manhattan - I was photographing all over New York, but you know, that that island, the idea of the island, you know, the island where the entire world is, and they're all packed in together and they're figuring it out. And they're figuring out how to live together, you know what I mean? It's romantic. And so, you know, I decided to move to New York City, with the goal of photographing 10,000 people on the streets of New York, and that was it. That was the beginning of Humans in New York.

**LUVVIE** How did when did you start Facebook page, the official Facebook page?

**BRANDON** I was talking with my friend about that last night, the same friend, um, who got me the job in Chicago, his father was one of these guys, that, you know, he's always trying to mentor the kids around them because he was an entrepreneur. And Mike Schafer was his name. And I remember, I've been in New York for a few different months, a few months at that time, and nothing was, I mean, I was working all day, every day, I didn't know anybody. I was living in a sublease with three people that I didn't know and Bedford Stuyvesant, and you know, I was, I was just working all day long, I get emotional every time I talk about this period, because it's just like, the feelings that I felt back then just like, come up surface. Um, but it was like, I didn't know anybody, I didn't have any money. I was working on something that a lot of people thought was ridiculous and didn't make sense. And I was doing it all day, every single day, and nothing was really coming of it. I was taking thousands of portraits.

And, and so like this Mike Shaffer is, a friend of mine, he's my friend's dad. And I was just posting all these pictures on my Facebook page. And he was like, "Oh, um, you need to start a page." And I was like, "Well, I already put my stuff on on Facebook." And he was like, "No, no, no, no, there's this thing called a page. It's like, got to have your own page for Humans of New York."

And, so I started this page. I was like, "Okay, I'll do it!" And I started just posting. And that was probably - and I was talking to my friend about this last night. Like, that was probably my biggest stroke of luck. We were talking about what was luck, what was skill, you know, and, and when you've struggled as hard as I have to make something work and tried so many things and failed at so many things and is kept trying and kept trying. It's very hard to attribute things to luck. It's like, Well, I mean, I suffered, and I struggled so hard, and so much of what I tried failed, and I just kept trying and kept trying until things worked. And it's so hard, you know, to say like, What do you mean, I was lucky? Like, I failed so many times, I just kept going, I just kept banging my head against the wall.

You know, but then you really you, you do look back and you realize there were just moments. Right place, right time. And I was one of the very first Facebook pages. And this was the time, you know, I remember the biggest Facebook page that I could find, when I when I made a Facebook page was Gay Marriage USA, the owner of is named Murray, became a good friend of



mine, I still very much value and appreciate and thankful to that man, because he shared a couple early Humans of New York posts of gay people that I took of photos of from the gay pride parade. And, like, so of my first 3,000 followers, two thirds of them are from the gay community. And I mean, you know, you're those first, that first followings the hardest to get. Yeah. So like, when I first created my page, like the biggest example, the page, he had 100,000 followers, like, that was the biggest Facebook page out there. And so I was that early, and I just started posting every single day, every single day, every single day. Um, and so you know, I just Humans of New York and got, you know, it got out in a new technology and new ecosystem very early. And the moment I saw that it was getting traction, I just never looked back. I just I posted. I mean, I worked every day, and I posted four or five times every single day for a years. Because I knew is working.

And like when you get when you've been in a place where you know that just that darkness of being out there on the limb, you move to New York City, you don't know anybody, you don't have any money. You're not sure if it's going to work and you have to fight those voices every single day. And you know, you go home and it's just - my room had nothing but a mattress on the floor. I didn't even have a bed It was a mattress on the floor. Didn't have anything on the walls. I don't want to be in that room just worrying about everything not working. So, you know, I would just go out and back and work and like and when you've been in that dark place. I remember darkest time in my life was Christmas holiday of that first year I was in New York.

**LUVVIE** 2010?

**BRANDON** Yeah, because I knew. Yeah, I knew like two people in New York and they both went home during the time, and I was completely alone, just completely alone for like two weeks, it was the holiday season. I remember I spent Christmas Eve in a diner alone.

And, yeah, it's like when you felt that, and when you felt that darkness, and then things start to work and you start to get this traction, you start to move forward, like, you just run, you hit that lane so hard, you know what I mean? Because it's like, in many ways, you're, you're running from that feeling, you know,

**LUVVIE** Yeah.

**BRANDON** I can't go back there, I can't go back there. It's working. All this is all of this loneliness, all of this uncertainty, all of this risk taking and sadness, there was a reason for it. And now it's working, it's something's coming out of it, and just don't look back and just go, just go,

**LUVVIE** Run, just run!

**BRANDON** That's what I did for years. Um, and, you know, eventually, I had to hit a point where I had to unwind some from that, you know, I had to unwind some from that psychology. of, if you stop for a second, it's all gonna disappear. You know what I mean? It's like, it's, it's if you stop for a second, you're gonna fall back?

**LUVVIE** Yes. to that place. When you start approaching people on the street? How do you get like, what is the prompt that you'd give them? What is the thing that allowed them to start talking because

I think early on - to your point - street photography was not considered a thing, really. And, you know, I'm sure people were like, "Who's this random guy approaching me?" How did you actually get people to tell you something?

**BRANDON** Right. So I will, I will say that street photography was a thing. Um, the, you know, there's a very long storied history of photographers that are much more talented than I am taking these beautiful candid shots of people on the street. What was new-er...you never know, you never want to say new because you've always got ancestors, even if you don't know about them. There's their

**LUVVIE** Facts.

**BRANDON** There's people who did, Abraham Lincoln said, I think Abraham, everything gets attributed Lincoln, right. But I'm, I'm almost almost positive that he said books, books serve to show young people that those wonderful original thoughts of the theirs aren't so original, after all.

**LUVVIE** That part.

**BRANDON** Yeah, and so it's, you know, there's always somebody who did what you were doing, but as far as what was on my radar, and what was on my perspective, um, there, there was nobody ever, who stopped random people and put them through very serious interviews, um, at least not in a systemic, a systematic way, every day like I was doing with Humans in New York. So that was new, it was the process of stopping somebody, and not only taking their photo, and all of this was an evolution because remember, I moved to New York, just take pictures of people. And that's all I did for a long time. And then I started adding little quotes. And then I started, the interviews got longer and longer. And I mean, you can look, you can just line you can just line the three books that I've written, each one published three days or three years apart, and see the evolution of the work. It goes from 90% photos with one little line of text under them to 90% text where it's just like a page full of text and a photo.

And then look at Tanqueray, I mean, Tanqueray is 12,000 words. And so it's, it's, it's gone, the evolution has been from one of photography to storytelling and in within the storytelling arc, it's gone from very superficial to much deeper, deeper, deeper, deeper. And, you know, that's something I'm still improving at, and I'm still getting better at, um, but the so the thing was, was how do you stop somebody, a random person, and make them feel comfortable, put them in a place where they are comfortable sharing. Where they're comfortable, opening up in a way that you need a person to open up to tell their story? Well, you know, it's like, it's to really find out the beauty and the depth and the struggle and the nuance of a person's story. It requires honesty, you know, because, you know, people, people tend to like speak in generalizations and they protect themselves and generate generalizations like what's your biggest struggle right now? Oh, work-life balance. Okay. What specifically? Are you having a hard time balancing? Oh, you know, everything, you know?

**LUVVIE** Right, right.

**BRANDON** Yeah. But like in order to get somebody's story, you have to know what's singular and specific to them. Which requires going down beneath generalities, which requires honesty, which requires

an environment where the person feels comfortable.

So the first skill that I really had to develop wasn't the interviewing skill itself. That's secondary, it's important. But you can't even begin that unless you can establish the rapport that's necessary to have an honest interview.

**LUVVIE** Correct.

**BRANDON** That was, that was the trick. That was the figuring out how to take a random stranger and make them feel comfortable well enough, in a very short amount of time, to have a very deep and impactful conversation with you.

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Rants fam – if you haven't joined us in LuvvNation and become a LuvvCousin yet, well, I need to know what you're waiting for. LuvvNation is my free community my free community that is a safe space in a dumpster fire world! [LuvvNation](#) is the place for the most thoughtful, funny, most chill-deficient people on the interwebs. We're a community that comes together to make each other better with curated conversations, opportunities to connect, and challenges to help us transform and do better in every area of our lives. You need to stop sitting on this and come to LuvvNation.com and get signed up. Or download the LuvvNation app in the App Store or on Android and come through that way. Ok – back to the podcast.

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**LUVVIE** So let's say you saw me on the street.

**BRANDON** Yeah.

**LUVVIE** And you stop me because on like an interesting hat or whatever.

**BRANDON** Okay. You do, right.

**LUVVIE** How would you approach me?

**BRANDON** Okay - so it's what I learned is, it's much more about energy than it is about what you would set you say, I, when I first began, I was like, trying all of these different things, I was trying to say all of these different things, maybe if I say the correct thing, then this person will allow me to interview them. Then I realized, you know, while I was so focused on the words that I was saying, I was gradually getting less and less nervous and more and more calm, as I was going on. And people started saying, Yes - not because my words were changing, but because my energy was changing.

By far the most important thing is to approach somebody with an energy of calmness. And it's

very hard to attain in an interaction between two strangers, because the dominant feeling when you first meet somebody that you're unfamiliar is suspicion, kind of, fear especially if it's on the sidewalk or Street.

**LUVVIE** Yeah.

**BRANDON** So be when you're coming at somebody with a source of calm. That's the first step to helping them feel calm. And so it's, it's about the pace, you know, it's about Excuse me. It's not like, oh, excuse me, can I ask you a question? Not that, like, excuse me. Um, I was wondering if there was any way that I can take your photograph, I run a website. It's called Humans in New York. And basically, what I do is I photograph people all over New York City. And I've learned a little bit about everyone that I photograph. And I was wondering if there's any way that I could take your photo and ask you a few questions?

Now in New York City. Most of the time, they've heard of humans in New York, which helps a lot. Um, but I've done this in 40 different countries around the world. I've done this, you know, pretty much everywhere. So, you know, I, you know, some people think, Oh, of course, it's easy for you to do it. Because people know, you know, your work is well known and people know who you are. Um, but that's not true everywhere.

**LUVVIE** I actually don't think a lot of people know what you look like Brandon, like...

**BRANDON** Which is beautiful. I would love that today. You know, I'm, I'm, you know, was out in the, you know, I was, I was kind of enjoying coffee with my family, and nobody came up to me. And it's just like, and I just thought help. It's something that I really value. And it's something I struggle with, you know, I, I, I wonder, I'm the correct mix of putting myself Brandon Stanton on the blog. Um, sometimes I wonder if I'm, if I've gone too far in the other direction, because I've never posted a picture of myself on the blog. I mean, I think the last picture I posted of myself was years ago.

**LUVVIE** You had on - the last picture I remember seeing of you is like you in like, a bubble jacket with your hat backwards.

**BRANDON** Yeah, yeah. And I haven't worn a backwards hat in years. And so it's like, it's, it's so good for so many different reasons. I do not think [Humans of New York](#) would have become Humans of New York, if it was called Brandon Stanton Photography. If my Instagram was Brandon Stanton. and I was posting the exact same thing, it wouldn't have become what it is. It's, it's the, and I still haven't put my finger on it. But the act of disappearing that I've done, the fact that Humans of New York does not contain any of my opinions, it does not contain any of my thoughts. It is my best ability and you can never you can never fully get out of the way of your own work, you know, I'm choosing the questions to ask I'm choosing the answers include, um, but as much as possible, becoming a channel just becoming a channel for another person to express themselves and to you to be portrayed. And that requires disappearing. Um, and the more that I've been able to do that the bigger Humans of New York has become the more powerful and more impactful it has become. But Humans of New York, the name, not Brandon Stanton when people do talk to me on the street, even big, big, big fans, they say they don't say nobody says, "Are you Brandon Stanton? Some people do, occasionally. But almost always. It's Are you Humans of New York? Are you Humans of New York?" You know what I mean?

And so it's like that, and it's it's really a beautiful thing because Humans of New York brings in all kinds of people who follow it. And there's nobody who is turned away by my opinion. There's nobody who is turned away by my personality. And it doesn't pollute the work. Do you know what I mean? Because I'm a flawed person. You know, we're all flawed people. If I put down every thought that I had, there just be so many things that like, 24 hours later, I'd be like, why did I write that?

**LUVVIE** Why did I say it?

**BRANDON** Yeah, you know what I mean? And like, but I don't, and not even in the comment section. Like, I've been commenting occasionally on the Tanqueray posts. And even then, like, afterwards, I'm like, oh, man, maybe I shouldn't have written it, you know what I mean? There's such a discomfort, uh, for putting my own thoughts because like, I want humans of New York to be immune from me.

**LUVVIE** Yes!

**BRANDON** I want it to be bigger than me. And I don't want to pull it down with my own weaknesses and my own flaws. Do you know what I mean?

**LUVVIE** I know exactly what you mean. I know exactly what you mean.

**BRANDON** And it requires removing myself from it. Um, and then I'm not gonna,

**LUVVIE** You know, it's actually funny, because so my book that came out, I'm, well, I'm judging you came out four years ago. But I remember I actually had to battle with my publishers, because they wanted to put me on the cover. And I said, I need to not be on the cover.

**BRANDON** Yeah.

**LUVVIE** Because I need to disappear in the words. Because if I'm on the cover, it wouldn't sell the numbers that it sold. Because somebody would be like, Oh, that's a book for Black girls if, they saw me. But I remember getting a story from a bookseller who said, this, like burly white dude with tattoos, saw my book cover through the window and came in and bought two copies.

**BRANDON** Interesting.

**LUVVIE** And I'm like, if I was on the cover, he wouldn't stop in and be like, that book might actually speak to me. So I totally understand the value of letting the work speak before you do. Before all the things that come with it. Because if people saw Brandon Stanton's Humans of New York, or Brandon Stanton's photo blog, and they see like, this white dude with a hat on, we will have ideas of what it's going to be in it.

**BRANDON** Exactly. Yeah, no, that's so true. And it's just like, Yeah, and I even used to, like, put my own voice occasionally in there. Like, I would put in quotes a question that I asked early on, and humans in New York, and then I even, you know, stopped doing that. Um, and it's again, it's, it's,

and it's, it's really amazing to it's like, you know, I, I like to think philosophically about why Humans in New York works, what is it about it?

And, okay, so if I, you know, obviously, I've, I've worked 10 years obsessively, just obsessively on this craft. So you know, there's some craftsmanship there. But beyond that, it's like, okay, so it's one of the most successful things on social media, but it breaks every social media rule. First, it's long form, it's the maximum amount people say, you want to get somebody's attention, keep it short. Keep it. I mean, I'm asking for people's time, every single time Humans in New York comes on there, you know, it takes a minute, in a minute and a half, at least to read these stories. It's taking a you know, a Tanqueray's stories, 24 single space pages, and people are coming along on that journey. I don't interact in the comment section, another huge, you know, anti-social media. No, no, you know, it really breaks all the rules, I haven't branded myself, it works and why is it that it works so well? There's this massive community, that the comment section is completely bustling and vibrant without my participation. Um, and, you know, I think it comes down to the inherent value of a story. You know, it's it's the stories build community, um, you know, stories, keep people engaged and stories, do all of the things better than an individual or a personality can do you know, so instead of instead of basing the the following on a personality, which I think is the go to for Instagram, and it's pretty much how all of social media works. Yeah. You know, that here's what I had for lunch today. Here's what I wore yesterday, which is which is fine because people love it. People love personalities, um, and somehow this website that I make, that I make, has worked without any personality from me, zero and in what is it and it's it's something about the power of a story.

**LUVVIE** Yeah.

**BRANDON** A well told story. Yeah. And so that's, that's what I focus on.

**LUVVIE** I think well told stories do break most rules. Um, a lot of times they say online, yeah, people have no attention span, right? Like so you stay in long form, you have the series that insists on people turn on the notifications. I don't turn on my notifications for any accounts on social media, not even my own, or my companies, but yours - Humans of New York. And it's because the power of the stories are stirring. Um, one of my favorite series that you did was when you went to Rwanda,

**BRANDON** Right?

**LUVVIE** That was one of the most stunning pieces of storytelling I have ever seen. And Brandon went to Rwanda and basically told the story of survivors of the Rwandan genocide over a series of how many, like how many posts was that?

**BRANDON** It was about, well, each post each story was multiple posts, and I interviewed about 10 different survivors. And you'll remember the theme was people who rescued other people that was, that was the thing that I focused on was rescuers. So these were members of the Hutu population, um, who did not participate in the genocide, and then beyond that risked their own lives by attempting to shelter people or save other lives. So that was the theme of it.

**LUVVIE** What made you go with that theme?

**BRANDON** Just, you know, it's like, how are you going to do it differently? How are you going to so I went to Rwanda. And you know, this is story, a beautiful country, by the way, I mean, Rwanda,

**LUVVIE** It's on my list.

**BRANDON** Oh, man. And, yeah, it's such an amazing story about what's happened, what Paul Kagame has done and the turnaround of that country. Everyone should go there. Um, but you know, when you go there, um, you know, in there's this, I mean, I don't think anything like that has happened in such contemporary history. This was not long ago at all. And these...

**LUVVIE** '94!

**BRANDON** ...these people are still living and they're still walking around. Um, and, you know, so it's just such a, the story completely cloaks the country, the story of the genocide completely cloaks the country, and it's hard to say the word Rwanda without thinking about the genocide. Um, and so it's like, how do you tell a story of what happened? That doesn't just lean into every lens that has been put upon this country? You know what I mean? It's

**LUVVIE** Yeah,

**BRANDON** and the brutality of it. And so to me, the the most interesting angle was, okay, who were the people that didn't go along? Who were the people that resisted all the social pressure to go along with what was happening on the time, I'm going to tell the story of the country through these individuals. Um, and so it was just an instinct I had, and I followed it. And it turned out great.

**LUVVIE** I just remember reading it and wondering how you were able to tell the story, like when you were speaking to these people who are living history? How did you keep composure? How do you feel the day after you do it? Or even the hours after you do it?

**BRANDON** Yeah, I mean, there's, there's different levels. I mean, there's part of me that I imagine is akin to like a therapist, where I've heard so many tough stories that I have probably a little bit of an ability to stay even keeled in the face of hearing about, um, you know, tragedy and trauma. Um, but then, you know, there's, there's a different tier where it's so overwhelming that yes, it can't help but seriously impacted me. Rwanda. I'm the pediatric cancer series, series on refugees where it's just like, oh my God, I cannot believe these people. It's like, it's like you're watching a horror movie, but it's real. You know what I mean? It's like, if somebody was to fictionalize a horror movie, um, with just the, you take your protagonist and just put them through the most traumatic and scary things you can possibly imagine. Here's an individual in front of you telling your life history, their life history, and they've gone through these actual things. And then it's coming up when they're telling you and they're going back to that place and you're sitting there going back to that place with them.

Claudine. Sole survivor of her family with seven, eight siblings, um, and telling in detail how really, it's in the book. Um, she's somebody that I've kept in touch with. But yeah, she saw her

whole family get get killed. And I mean, it wasn't in one moment either. You know, they few of them escaped. And one by one, they were caught. And at different times, it was a whole...and she was the only one who survived. And, you know, walking through that with her? Uh, yeah, you know, it's, it's, it's tough.

The, there's something also redemptive and cleansing about telling the story, you know, not only for me, but for the person involved, that suddenly, remember when we were talking about when, you know, the feeling of being in New York, or the feeling of just starting out, in as an artist and being in this like, very dark place.

**LUVVIE** Yeah,

**BRANDON** Again, that the reason that first dose of success is such an amazing sense of euphoria, is because it somehow validates all the loneliness and pain that you went through, that you and you carried this extreme doubt the entire time that nothing was going to come of it. And then suddenly, something comes from it. And like, everything that was you did that other people were laughing at suddenly had meaning?

**LUVVIE** It makes sense.

**BRANDON** It's the same thing with a story, that the process of framing somebody's history, and their pain and their suffering into a narrative that can reach out and have meaning for other people that can serve as a survival guide to other people that can give comfort to other people. It has a redemptive quality, because it takes something that was previously unexplainable, and gives meaning.

So you know, I think one of the things that helps from getting overwhelmed in these situations is, um, knowing that there is utility to it, that you're able to do something, I feel like you really get, um, compassion, fatigue and empathy fatigue, which is an actual term and actual definition, in the world of, you know, NGOs, and nonprofits and people who are on the frontlines trying to help people. It's the feeling that you're not making a difference with the feeling that there's so many problems and so much suffering and that you're, you are planting yourself in the middle of so many people suffering, and you're not seeing the situation change as quickly as you would hope in a way that that really wears you down. Um, you know, being having Humans in New York, his platform, and being able to share these people's journeys and seeing the impact and the healing that they are afforded through the process is also very nourishing for me. And knowing that, that is, the endpoint of the process, helps the process even no matter how emotionally taxing it is be more bearable.

**LUVVIE** That's real. And that is no more clear than in the story Lady Tanqueray. Stephanie. She has taken the world by storm, like in the middle of a global pandemic, as a world is basically on fire in different ways. We're finding joy in this woman who you first photographed last November 2019?

**BRANDON** Correct.



**LUVVIE** On the streets of New York.

**BRANDON** Right.

**LUVVIE** Who instantly stole everybody's heart. And now you are 21 out of 32 so far of the story.

**BRANDON** I just posted 22. I posted it right before we got on.

**LUVVIE** I'm sure people have tagged me.

**BRANDON** I posted it right before we got on I knew you were gonna be mad because you didn't have time to read it.

**LUVVIE** You know, people you know people have tagged me by the time you go back to you're gonna do can be 30 tags of my name on it? Like, have you seen this? I'm going to be like, Don't worry, I was doing a call...

**BRANDON** This is the most X-rated one.

**LUVVIE** For real.

**BRANDON** Yeah, it's bad. Well, it's bad and good. It's good-bad.

**LUVVIE** I got Brandon, you sent me a sneak peek. You will be proud to know I actually have not looked at the sneak peek at all some I'm reading along with everybody else. Because I was like, I feel like we need to absorb this together as a people.

**BRANDON** It's definitely the best way to do it.

**LUVVIE** It is the best way to do it! So I'm like, Okay, I'm also waiting with bated breath. So tell me how this whole thing started and how you saw her last year.

**BRANDON** Right? I'm coming back - I mean, what was so interesting about this, particularly it was outside the framework with which in, in which I've met everybody else through Humans in New York, which is while I'm out working with my camera, stopping random people with Stephanie, who's her real name, I was coming home from the gym. I didn't have my camera with me. I was, it was winter or is late November. It was cold. It's a cold day. And I was sweaty, I was wearing shorts and a T shirt. I just been off the treadmill and I lived close enough to the gym that I just like, threw on a sweatshirt and just I was like, I'm just gonna do it. And I was almost home. Stephanie and I are neighbors. Um, I was almost home, and I see this 76-year-old woman coming to toward me, and she's got this very outlandish coat on that she made herself. And I just, you know, she was really struggling to walk. And I was just like, Well, you know, I'm just gonna give her a compliment. I said, Hey, just, "You look great. You look great." And she said, "Let me ask you something!" She's calling me over. I'm laughing now because I know, Stephanie so well, it's just like so Stephanie. "Come here! Let me ask you something. Why is it that only white boys wear shorts in the winter? Why?" But I just...

**LUVVIE** Asking the questions that we all have.

**BRANDON** And I just started laughing. And then she just starts going, "Where do you live?" And I go, "Over there." And she goes, "Over there! You know, back in the 1970s, that place used to be full of drug users. And it was the ghetto. He used to be full of drug users and whores, and prostitutes back in that time I was doing..." and she just launched into a story

**LUVVIE** As all black women are prone to do. Yes, indeed.

**BRANDON** There's nothing. There's, I mean, what...Stephanie is fascinating. It's one of her fascinating character quirks like, instead of saying hello, she will tell you a story like it was, she will launch into a story before she even reached you. Like she will be telling you some very detailed story about something that happened 30 years ago that's just wild, that and and so that was it.

And I'm just listening to her. I haven't said a word. All she did was asked me why I was wearing shorts, like eight minutes later, and I we're way back in the 70s, and she's dancing, and I said, Look, this is gonna sound crazy - because this is somebody I know, doesn't know what Humans in New York is like, I have a demographic and seven people who aren't on social media, not my demo, normally. And I said, "Look this is gonna sound crazy. I do something where I stop people and I talk about talk to them. And I learn their stories. Do you mind if I run back to my house and just get my camera?" And I did. Um, and I took her photo and I was writing down the stuff she was saying. And she she tells me now that she kind of just forgot about it. She's like, you know, whatever. Some guy took a picture from me probably some, you know, kid doing a school project or something. I, you know, next thing she knows she's just getting stopped on the street. Like, "Oh, my gosh! It's you! It's you! It's you!" Because the posts went so viral. You know, that's stories. Yeah, just went nuts.

Um, and so then, in the wake of that, um, you know, she had so many people coming after she had everybody wanted to know who the President was. And I was even talking with her last night. I said, "Stephanie, do you think you think we should tell it? Like, I mean, you know, if we did tell who the President was, it would, everybody in the world read your...." "I can't do it. Not doing it. Not doing it."

**LUVVIE** But did she tell you though?

**BRANDON** Oh, yeah, I know.

**LUVVIE** Tell Stephanie I need to know. I can be the vault. I ain't gonna tell nobody. But I want to know, Brandon.

**BRANDON** Yeah, she goes, "These people, this is these are powerful people." But anyway, so I completely lost my train of thought with...

**LUVVIE** So the thing went nuts, everybody's following her, looking for her.

**BRANDON** Oh, I know. Okay, so there's like journalists, like freaking her out, liked parked out in front of her place. Stephanie's very hard to find, because she's a very private person. Normally, journalists

can find anybody, they can get your cell phone number in 10 seconds if they want it, and they'll just call you directly, but they were having a hard time finding her. And, you know, they were like studying the shot trying to figure out exactly where it was. And there was this one guy from England that had been assigned by his editor to find out who the President was just stalking her. All these people wanted to make movies honor and just wanting to meet with her. It's just non stop.

Um, and at some point, I was just like, man, like, I'm a storyteller. I love telling stories. And I've got this massive audience with Stephanie. That's the thing about Stephanie. We've raised a lot of money for her, but I think she would trade all the money for being on stage. In a second. She just loves she loves an audience. Stephanie loves an audience. And I had an audience. And so I said, and I was fascinated by her story. And so I was like, "Okay, you know, why don't we put all these discussions on hold that you're having, um, and why don't we just tell your story on my blog?" And at that point, Stephanie, you know, she went from being almost apartment bound to every time she walked out the door, having 20 people come up to her and want to take a selfie. So, in her mind, she didn't know much about my website, but it was she liked what happens when she got on my website. So she said, "That's what I want to do. I want to go I want to do that again, I want to I want to go with you!"

And so we started meeting in the diner, I'm met about 20 times and I just transcribed this woman's story. Amazing. Like, like, like everybody else. Like, there's just so many times I'm just like, "I cannot believe I'm typing this, like, I cannot believe I'm typing this. I mean..."

**LUVVIE**

There's a few times where I'm like, I'm just wondering what Brandon's face look like when she dropped this tidbit.

**BRANDON**

Well, the storyteller I mean, I just loved it, you know, it's just like, "Oh, my God, this is so good. I can't believe it. I can't believe it." Like, it's just like, when I'm just because when I am just loving listening to a story, it's like, that's one thing I've learned from Humans in New York that like, you know, the, I am the first, I'm the first audience member, because I'm hearing this for the first time. If I'm not crying, the audience is not gonna cry. If I'm not laughing, the audience is not gonna laugh. Um, and so I was just so enthralled and laughing so loud at so many points in her story that I knew, I knew it was going to be a, if I could, if I could, if I could get it. Because I knew writing a 12,000 word story was not going to be the same as writing a, you know, 250 word story, I knew it was going to be a big challenge. I struggled with it. I struggled and wrestled with it for months and months and months. I mean, it was three times as long as it was just three weeks ago. And I yeah, because I was like, I was thinking about maybe even turning it into a book or a podcast. And this

**LUVVIE**

I remember, you emailed me about that.

**BRANDON**

Yeah. And I had to, I had to get it ready for the blog. And so I had to make some very tough decisions, which I think ended up being very good. For the story itself of way of what to include, you know, that's what somebody like Stephanie who's been through so much, you know, the, the difficult part of storytelling isn't finding more information. It's taking, you know, these hundreds of amazing memories and stories and, and giving them a single spine and the single thrust, it's a single journey, you want the audience on a single journey. In the end, you need that to resolve at the end. Um, and I'd never done that before. This is a new skill. I was learning, you

know what I mean? I felt like, you know, and I was wrestling and struggling with it. And it went through so many drafts and so many drafts.

**LUVVIE** Were you your own editor in this process?

**BRANDON** Yes. Very much so. Yeah,

**LUVVIE** That's tough. That's tough.

**BRANDON** I would write it, I would write all my drafts. And then I would print them out, I would go through with pencil and write it again, I write it again, and I'd write it again. Um, and so, you know, again, and the the difficult part about doing this with Stephanie is she has so many stories, she's up a vessel of a million stories, and taking that million stories and finding the story. Um, that is, that is the challenge. And it was new for me. So I really, really struggled with it. And, you know, in a way, it's like, again, the feeling that it's been a great week for me, it's been, you know, it's it's kind of a mini version of what happened with Humans in New York, I went out on a limb and I tried something I've never done before. I was wracked by doubt that it was going to work. I was wracked by uncertainty and moments of "Oh my gosh, I'm wasting my time. This is never gonna work. This is never gonna work. You can't post this on social media and nobody's gonna follow it." Like, "There'll be people will be following it for the first three posts, but then they're just going to move on. That's not how social media works. And by the time you get to post 32, there's gonna be about 17 diehards left and everybody else will have moved on." You know, so there's a lot of fear and uncertainty, because, I mean, this was months of my life that I spent on this, um, and there's like, a lot of fear and uncertainty that it wasn't going to connect and it wasn't gonna work. And seeing it work and seeing it connect and seeing you in every comment section all these other people who are just like waiting for it. I was so doubtful, and so, you know, that that was gonna happen and seeing it happen. is such a good feeling. You know, it's, it's a joy, it's a joy. You know, it's a joy for Stephanie. We've raised her a lot of money, but you know.

**LUVVIE** Listen! Sis is a millionaire now! I was like, can we get there? And sure enough! In two days, got there!

**BRANDON** That was a big surprise as well. I mean, I, I knew we were gonna raise her plenty of money, but this, you know, the degree to which people connected and stepped up and helped her out, um, was beyond my expectations and that that's been one great surprise of this.

**LUVVIE** I think she reminds us all of somebody that we know are on our grandmother, you know, a family friend who we noticed and been through some things we don't know all their stories, but we would like that person has seen some things. And she represents this person that we all connect to, because we want them to finally win and we want them to finally not have to have the crazy stories, the rest of their lives has been crazy. So hopefully now they're having ease. And I think that's why I connected with with her. And the moment I saw you post about her and I read her story. I was like...

**BRANDON** You were, you were you. You're you were - you loved Stephanie very early on. Yeah, you were, you were, you were like you were emailing me you were, you were, you were one of those people.

**LUVVIE** I was one of those people!

**BRANDON** I told you like, everybody was coming after Stephanie. The difference with you though, is I'd seen your name following the blog for a while and I knew you were a fan. And I was like, all right, well, once, once we're ready to do something, we're going to give it to Luvvie first because this is this isn't somebody that just dropped out of the sky. Luvvie's been with us for a long time here. So yeah, yeah, you're always on the top of my list. Whenever, whenever it comes together, whatever it's gonna be, I'm gonna let Luvvie know first, which is why I contacted you and I sent you the early draft. And, yeah.

**LUVVIE** I was like, "Oh my God!"

**BRANDON** It wasn't opportunism. It coming from love. It was coming from love.

**LUVVIE** From love man. Authenticity, man, I was like, yo, no, like this woman. And I also knew, I also knew that in that moment, because I know what happens when people go viral very quickly, is that everybody wants a piece of them in a way that's like, how can I get something from them? And I was like, I can't imagine how many offers she's getting. And people being like, I want to do this thing. And I'm really glad that she kind of had you to steward that moment. And this moment,

**BRANDON** Yeah, well, but I was second guessing myself too. Because like, okay, I kind of said, Alright, let's do this story together. Um, and, you know, four months later, she has this horrible health crisis, or several months later, she has this horrible health crisis. She hasn't gotten any money from her story yet. You know what I mean? Because our plan was, we're going to do a podcast, and I was going to give her the money from it. That was the plan.

**LUVVIE** Right.

**BRANDON** Um, and now, you know, she turned away all these movie producers to work with me, and to flesh the story out with me. Um, and now she's in this horrible situation. She I wasn't finished with the story yet. You know, I was, I was, I still had a long ways to go. Then I started Yeah, I started kind of doubting myself, Was I a good steward? You know what I mean? Should I have just told her to take the very first check that was given to her? Um, you know, obviously, in the end, it turned out that, you know, Humans of New York was, by far the best way to tell her story. I mean, she wasn't going to get this kind of money, this kind of this kind of support, this kind of community around her in any other way. And everything else is still on the table. You know, she's...

**LUVVIE** Right.

**BRANDON** Everybody's coming back. You know,

**LUVVIE** Of course they are! Even more!

**BRANDON** It's her moment again. And so, it all worked out. Well, in the end, but yeah, but there were times where I was questioning. You know, ethics are a tricky thing. You never know what the right you know, it's not always clear what the right thing to do. So I was having my own moment was like, Did I do an unethical, like, should I was I selfish to want to tell this story should I've just told her to take the first check that she could get? Um, and so there was, you know, there were moments where I was worried that I'd done her wrong in that way. Um, and I'm, you know, very glad obviously, that, that in the end, it turned out to be the right thing.

**LUVVIE** So is she reading the comments? How was she like keeping up with this series right now?

**BRANDON** Hilariously, so much of so much of it comes from my, my daily calls with her my updates. Like she gets on, she's actually been remarkably disciplined about it. She said, like, she spent one day reading nothing with comments and she said, she can't do that again. So she's, she's kind of, you know, I think she'll get on there occasionally. She's just on Facebook, not on Instagram. And I tell her, I said like, cuz she thinks it's the biggest thing in the world. And all she can see is Facebook. And I'm just like, you know, take what you're seeing on Facebook and multiply by two and that's Yeah, so You know, she, she's, she's and again, she, she loves it, you know, it's it's it's very good for her. It's it's she was in a dark place it's and now she's in a very hopeful place, in a very energized place. She goes, she's, she's got all these ideas, she's got all these business ideas and things she wants to do now, um, she is one of the things that she wants to make masks and she wants to call it Tanqueray's Masquerade. Because Tanqueray loves to sew, like Stephanie loves to sew. And she's very good at it. And so she's got all these ideas she wants to plan these...

**LUVVIE** Tell her I'll be a brand ambassador she needs

**BRANDON** She wants to give burlesque tours now, I mean, keep in mind, she can't get out of her wheelchair. And she's like, that's not she's - in her mind. She's gonna be in heels in a week and doing all this stuff. So, I mean, it's good that mind before body so she's hopefully, hopefully her body will follow, follow her her will and her imagination. And she'll get up and at 'em soon.

**LUVVIE** What does this money allow her to now do? Um, especially I know, she was in crisis before?

**BRANDON** Yeah, well, I mean, that's, the big deal. I mean, crisis, it was bad. It was bad. Um, and so first thing, it just takes that stress off her. I mean, just, yeah, it was bad. Ah, so stability first. Health. Second, you know, maybe health should be first. I mean, she's got some major health needs, we need to take her. She's, like, I'm trying to get her benefits, and it was a mess, it was a mess. And she had nobody helping her. Um, and so now, I've been trying to help her with all this stuff. So it's like, not only we're getting your money, we're trying to get her on the grid, that's like big, we're trying to get her on the grid.

**LUVVIE** Okay.

**BRANDON** And so, and then, like, their own, she hasn't been able to get out of her apartment. So it's like, we had a doctor come look at her in the apartment, but she needs some serious health care, like some experts. So that's next, and then now she'll be able to do that. Um, and so like, once, you know, once we get her healthy again, um, you know, then it, you know, it'll for me, I want the money to, like, take care of the worst case scenario, you know, like, I would love her to be walking in three weeks, um, and you know, just be able to, you know, use the money, the, you know, the, the, the terms of the trust are for her living expenses, but that's a broad word. You know, I certainly, I know, the audience's intent is to make Stephanie's life comfortable and happy.

**LUVVIE** Yes.

**BRANDON** And so yes, I'm not, you know, trying to, you know, you know, put limits on how she can, how she can, you know, provide her her own life and enjoy her own life. Um, you know, the, but what I want the fundraiser to do is prepare for the worst case scenario, which is, what if she can't walk again? What if she needs round the clock home health service, that's \$5,000 a week.

**LUVVIE** Shut up.

**BRANDON** Yeah, it's a quarter million dollars a year. Um, and, you know, I, hopefully we can, we can get around insurance. And that'll help like, I honestly don't, I mean, I'm learning all this for the first time.

**LUVVIE** Right.

**BRANDON** And it's just like, I don't know how much of that, all I know, is, it's coming out my pocket right now. Like, I don't know how much healthcare or insurance will provide. Um, and then if she does have to go to home, those, those homes in New York are insane. Eight to \$10,000 a year. And these are just for the basics, you know, I forget anything she might want, this is just what she's gonna need. She lives another 15 or 20 years, I mean, she is a very, very, you know, strong-willed woman, you know what I mean, um, that's going to be extremely expensive. If she lives another 10 years, it's going to be extremely expensive, which is one thing I was reminding the audience of today, it's like \$1.3 million. Sounds like a ton of money. But when a when somebody is as disabled as she is and needs as much attention as he does, I mean, that can get zapped very fast. So that's, that's the main goal is I want to put a safety net under her that prevents her from ever falling into a desperate situation again, um, you know, obviously the ideal situation, she gets healthy, you know, she's not she doesn't live an extravagant life at all, she gets healthy. Um, she lives off the interest of the trust very comfortably, and it gets passed on to the charity that she's chosen. And it's a wonderful thing for everybody. But my main concern is protecting the downside. Um, and so that's that's what I think the the main purpose of the money.

**LUVVIE** So you've been managing a lot of this yourself and you've been spending your own money for her care in these these months.

**BRANDON** And it's, it's I Humans of New York is audience supported and it I have a [Patreon](#) and I think it's you you know, it's kind of unspoken, the reason that people give to the [Patreon](#) is to support Humans of New York, but the people who give it to my [Patreon](#) know that a large amount,

probably a majority of it goes to helping out people that I tell their stories that are in a place of need. Um, so you know, I call it my money, um, but it's coming from the [Humans of New York Patreon](#). Um, but you know, even that, even the [Patreon](#) would not be enough to support it long term, because it's, you know, what she needs is so expensive. She needs health care now, like, big time. She doesn't have Medicaid, she does have Medicare. So it's like, do you just let her suffer or be paid out of pocket, you know what I mean? So it's just like, the getting, getting her on her feet, you know, getting her kind of stable, took a lot of resources and a lot of time. Um, now we've got a nice system, we've got her, um, we have her home health aide that comes every single day, um, that she likes. And she,

**LUVVIE** Because you know, if she don't like them she would be totally lambasting that person.

**BRANDON** Yes, yes. Um, yes. And so we've got her in a good place now. And so we got a nice place to build on. Um, and so things are looking good. Things are looking good for everybody at a talk with her last night. And I was just like, you know, this is just, things are really great. The story is so beautiful. And it's just like, I've always thought it was beautiful, but seeing people react to it. It's like, Yeah, it really, really is beautiful. You know what I mean? And yeah, it's going you don't even know, you know, you know where it's going. But it's, it's, it's going to somewhere very tender. And you know, very, it's, it's going there's all these, like wild kind of anecdotes involved. But, you know, the underlying, you know, heart and soul of the story is something very tender and tragic in a lot of ways. Um, and, yeah, it's, it's, it's a very beautiful story in a very beautiful life.

**LUVVIE** Roberta was right. Everybody was like, Roberta was right. Okay. She did come in some big money. All right. I mean, [my hope is that we get to \\$2 million](#).

**BRANDON** Yeah, I mean, my hope is too and, you know, I think the, I think the last third of the stories when Tanqueray kind of gives way to Stephanie. And it, it becomes anchored in a very real place where, you know, and I'll let you see, oh, I'll let it unfold. But um,

**LUVVIE** I'm like, what, how many more days are you gonna do because we have 11 we have 10 more stories.

**BRANDON** I think I'm gonna post the [last post on Monday](#). And then there will probably be a little bit of epilogue about what's come through the storytelling itself, which is great. Um, so that's how I see it right now.

**LUVVIE** I love it. And then so you have a book coming out Brandon sent me the ARC that he apologized for over and over again.

**BRANDON** Oh, you've got a you've got the ARC

**LUVVIE** I got the ARC. Yeah, the advanced reader copy this is before

**BRANDON** Oh, God, my computer is actually sitting on the book. Hold on. I'm using it to set up so here's the here's the actual hardcover. So. Yeah. Um, so I'm excited about that. That's another, yeah, it's



big. It's a big couple weeks for me with the Tanqueray and it was gonna be big, even without Tanqueray because the book is coming out. So this is a, it's been pretty full.

**LUVVIE** How, how are you finding pockets of joy and peace in these moments?

**BRANDON** Oh, I mean, first of all, I just try to be very grateful. for the, for everything that's happened every single step of the way. You know, I try to take a long walk in a quiet place and just be like, gosh, dang, like you're it's just so amazing what's happened in your life and you know, the, the privilege of doing Humans in New York, the privilege of being able to tell stories to so many people, you know, it's just like that. I think that's the foundation of peace and the foundation of happiness is gratitude and just like just to be very thankful for everything and then that's how I've been this week. It's a it's really not pockets for me, it's you know, not it's, it's like, I just this entire week's been really a delight for me. You know, it's just been the privilege of telling the story, the [privilege of sharing Tanqueray - her life and bringing so many people on this journey](#). Um, it's just a it's a massive privilege, and it just feels great. It feels wonderful. Um, and I'm enjoying it and Um, but yeah, I'm very, very happy.

**LUVVIE** Um, you don't necessarily put your opinions on Humans of New York or your thoughts and all that good stuff. But I actually think that you're reflected in the work a bit. because ever since Humans of New York started, you've made sure to tell stories of the world as it is, like Humans of New York was never like, oh, all white people, and all straight people. It was, this is the world. This is everybody in their different ways, and every story is valid. And I think that is an opinion. And I think it's an amazing one.

**BRANDON** That's so good. Thank you. Uh, it's like, yeah, whenever, whenever, whenever people do ask about my opinions, I'll always just go back to the work, like you said, and I guess it is an opinion, it's like, My opinion is the less, the less I'm in it, the better it is, you know, and I think that's, that's my opinion.

It's, it's amazing like this. Listen, like, I haven't, I'm gonna go through the book. I'm gonna get that actual hardcopy

**LUVVIE** You've got the one with the black and white photos.

**BRANDON** That's the advance, I'll send you one with the full color hardcover. I'll write you a little note, I got like a box of them right here. Then I'm also resting my computer on so you'll get you'll get one of the first ones. I'll draw a little picture in there of Tanqueray. I'll get Tanqueray to sign it too.

**LUVVIE** Listen.

**BRANDON** I know oh, well, I wish it was the if it was if it was pre pandemic days me and Tanqueray would just post up in Barnes and Noble in Union Square and having an event and we just signed books for hours, the two of us and I know more people would be there for her than me and I wouldn't care.

**LUVVIE** They were definitely coming for Stephanie. Like, listen, that's bae.

**BRANDON** I know. She wouldn't let me hear the end of it either.

**LUVVIE** My - I would love to interview her too.

**BRANDON** "Look at my line and you're line, did you see that?"

**LUVVIE** Flex! She gonna be flexing on you, Brandon. Yeah, no, I think she's brilliant and I think I'm, listen, my goal is to one day interview her also. Tell her I'm a huge fan. And however way - what do you think is most helpful for people to do right now that will help both your platform? And Stephanie?

**BRANDON** Alright, well, you know, on the, you know, Stephanie, the very obvious one is we've got the [GoFundMe](#) going right now, um, I mean, but just read her story. That's a big one. I mean, again, like I tell you, I think that matters to her more than dollars is, you know, having, having people read her story. And that means a lot to her. And she, she loves that aspect of it, probably more than anything financial that comes from it, if you'd like to, you know, help, um, with her care, the [GoFundMe](#) is going on for a few more days. As far as Humans if New York, you know, I think the two biggest way I mean, but on the same way, as Stephanie, it's like, you want to make me happy, just read the blog, read my work. Well, that's by far number one, you know, the, as far as supporting it materially, I have a [Patreon](#). And I also sell books. So those are always the two ways to support the blog is to buy a book or join the [Patreon](#). So if you'd like to do that, as well, you are welcome. And I would thank you.

**LUVVIE** And what do you think is the thing you're proudest of, because of this platform,

**BRANDON** Whew! The thing I'm proudest of, um, you know, just, again, I had a, I had a talk with my friend last night about this. And just, you know, we were talking about how like, even billions and billions and billions and billions of dollars, if you had \$10 billion wouldn't necessarily be able to buy the ability to create transformation in people's lives. And through the stories that are told on Humans of New York, I am in a position to tell stories that will give somebody the piece of wisdom or the piece of connection or the piece of comfort that they need, that can provide a transformative moment in their lives at a very important moment. And, you know, having the ability through my art and through my hard work, to be, to have such a pivotal importance in certain moments and so many lives is the privilege and the honor of a lifetime. And I think that's probably what I'm proudest of.

**LUVVIE** Boom. That's a good way to drop the mic. Brandon, this has been an honor a pleasure and just incredible and I'm so glad I got to interview you. And always a fan, you will see me in the comments. You know, cheering on Lady Tanqueray. And I'm crying along with everybody else.

**BRANDON** Thanks Luvvie.

**LUVVIE** So, thanks. Thank you so much for your time. Absolutely.

**BRANDON** Bye.

Yo, that interview, energize me in such a way! Brandon was so vulnerable, we usually see him behind the lens - well, we usually don't see him. But now to hear his story to know about the man behind the pictures. Yo, what an honor. I think I am most thankful for that piece he said about not letting his weaknesses, bring down his work. That's significant because as artists and as people in the world who have imposter syndrome, whatever it is, oftentimes we get in the way of our best work, we get in the way of being the people who can create transformative change. It's just, I'm just such a fan. I'm such a fan. He just made me even more of a fan.

Be sure to follow Brandon's work on social media. He is [@humansofny](#) on Instagram, and [Humans of New York on Facebook](#). And be sure to check out his new book humans it comes out October 6th. Support the good work that he's doing out here in this world. Keep reading his stories, join his [Patreon](#). I know I'm a part of his [Patreon](#). And yeah, let's just keep supporting storytellers like Brandon and beyond. Storytellers who even don't have the privilege that he has and who might just be getting started. And I think that's at the core of what he's doing is that all the stories that we want to tell are valid.

If you loved this interview, if you got anything out of it, please share this with everybody be loud about them listening to this episode of Rants and other ones because Brandon's an incredible guest, but we've also had some other amazing ones. So, yeah, looking forward to having you loud it all over the place.

Much love to Chicago Recording Company who I've been partnering with, from the start of this podcast, and they've been such a huge help putting together my recordings, bring you all the radio voice.

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As always, you can follow me on social media, I'm at [@Luvvie](#) everywhere.