**File Name: Episode 94**

**File Length: 40:53**

**Ericka:**Like I said, my husband and I are both black Americans. And we live in a neighborhood that is a pretty wealthy neighborhood in Atlanta. And so, we had a Lyft driver who was also a black American pick us up, and he was kind of talking about, "Oh, I pick up millionaires all the time in this neighborhood", and talking about "they are so like, this and they are so like that, and this is where they hang out". And my husband and I just kind of looked at each other and winked, because it's like, we're millionaires, but nobody, including other black people, like nobody would look at us and think that we're millionaires. And it's funny, and it's sad at the same time, because I think there needs to be more visibility and hope for people to know you could look like us and be wealthy.

**Narrator:**You're listening to the Millionaires Unveiled Podcast, where you'll hear the stories and interviews of everyday millionaires. We'll unveil their decisions, their strategies and their current portfolio allocation. Now to your hosts, Clark Sheffield and Jace Mattinson.

**Clark:**Hello and welcome back to the Millionaires Unveiled Podcast, where we tell the stories and strategies of everyday millionaires and unveil their current portfolio allocations. This is episode number 94. On today's show, we have a great interview with Ericka, she has a current net worth of around 1.2 million. She has a great story and investment allocation, which includes making $400,000 on a sale of a New York apartment, a unique real estate investment strategy where she rents furnished spaces out to airline employees. And so, just a really great and kind of different story with Erika. Last week on the show we had Loonie Doc, he's a Canadian Doctor who unveiled his allocation of investments in the market. One piece of advice he gave is to develop an investment plan, rebalance your portfolio when needed, and to stick to your goals.

But before we get into today's interview with Ericka, just want to thank our sponsor Obsidian Capital for supporting the show. Creating passive income is one of the quickest ways to create and establish wealth. At Obsidian Capital their core philosophy is to enable qualified investors to create long term wealth passively, through strategic real estate investments. Their team of experienced real estate professionals identify stabilized and value add multifamily real estate assets that will provide strong financial returns, a healthy risk profile, tax incentives and additional benefits that come with investing in real estate. They pride themselves on a high level of integrity and have experience in acquiring and managing over $300 million in multifamily assets. Furthermore, their leadership has over 45 years of combined industry experience. View their website today to learn more about their streamline investment process at www.obsidiancapitalco.com.

Another quick bit of information here, we've been on a couple podcasts lately. The first is Stacking Benjamins, which was launched in February, and that was an episode titled Develop your Game Plan for your Money. The second was more recently on the Passive Real Estate Investing Podcast with Marco Santorelli and that was episode number 172, titled Lessons Learned from Millionaires or Lessons for Millionaires. So, that'll provide a little bit more insight into us, who we are, our stories, and some of the lessons learned and things that have stood out to us as we've interviewed millionaires on our show. So, if you're interested in those interviews, go check it out, some unique perspectives and stories. Also, we'd love to share your millionaire financial story. So, we're trying to provide a unique set of stories and unique set of individuals and guests. So, if you're a millionaire or close to becoming a millionaire, we'd love to share your story. Our email is millionairesunveiled@gmail.com, we'd love to have you reach out to us. But without any further delay, let's jump right into today's episode with Ericka.

**Jace:**Welcome to the show Ericka, do you want to just give us a little bit about your background and kind of what you're doing now?

**Ericka:**Sure. So, I am in my 30's, I call myself a Xennial. So, I'm right on the kind of border of millennial and Generation X, which I think has positioned me really well, kind of for financial freedom. I started off you know, living in New York City, making $35,000 a year and I think I'm kind of a classic example of someone who shows that you don't have to make a lot of money in order to become a millionaire, and/or have financial freedom because I started off really not making a lot of money. But by switching my focus, I went from, you know, I was an English major, and started off thinking I wanted to be a journalist, but then quickly realized that I was not going to be able to make a liveable wage, or at least what I considered a livable wage on that path. And quite honestly, I didn't enjoy the work. So, I started getting into the business side of journalism, and that led me, just through curiosity and hustle, into market research, which is the career I'm in now. And I've been making, you know, well over six figures since shortly after I entered the workforce, simply by doing a slight shift. You know, using the same skill set that I have always had, but just shifting more to the quantitative side of my skill set from I think, softer skills that unfortunately don't get paid as well. So, yeah, now I live in Atlanta. I'm financially free and have been free since 2015, and just would love to help other people be aware of the fact that they can also be free in their 30's by making good financial choices.

**Jace:**Awesome. I want to get a little more into that. But first, what is your net worth sitting out today?

**Ericka:**Right now? So, my husband and I combined, we're at about 1.4 million.

**Jace:** And how is that broken up?

**Ericka:**Sure. So, we focus a little bit more heavily on real estate. So, about 60%, 59% to be exact, of our portfolio is in real estate. And that consists of seven rental units, all of which are single family homes, except for one which is a triplet. And then, we also have our primary residence, which is a town home worth about 300,000. And I sometimes count that townhouse actually as one of our rental units because we actually purchased it as a rental, and then ended up moving into it back in 2015, and that's part of the way we became financially free, just because it's super-duper cheap to live here. And then, another 26% I would say, is in investments, funds and stocks. And that's a mix of 401k and index funds, and I'm a big Vanguard fan. So, we have VTAX, and then I have a couple of those, the free fidelity index funds as well. And then, I also have some individual stocks from just a former employee, as part of our compensation, we got stock. And then, my aunt when I graduated college, actually gave me some stock from the company she worked for, which was AT&T. So, I kept those stocks as well. 12% of the portfolio is cash, which is a bit higher than what I want, but because we have been real estate investors, I used to like to keep large amount liquid, so, if I saw a deal, I could buy cash. And there are no deals right now, so, I'm trying to slowly shift that more towards index funds. And then the last little 3% or so, is in miscellaneous investments like crypto, cars and furnishings, because we do primarily furnished rentals or corporate rentals. So, those furnishings have value and I do include that in our net worth.

**Jace:**Interesting. So, how did you kind of get into doing the corporate rental route? And are all those properties paid off?

**Ericka:**That's a good question. So, when I say corporate, that's a bit of a misnomer, but they're really, I would call them like Airbnbs for pilots. So, my husband is an airline pilot, and we stumbled kind of by accident upon this space, which is called crash pads, essentially, because his employer, you know, we live in Atlanta, but he got assigned a crew base in another state, in Detroit. And this happens all the time in aviation, I would say 70% of the people are assigned to crew bases in a state other than where they primarily live. And that means that every day when he would have to go to work, he had to commute from Atlanta to Detroit. Like I said, 70% of aviation professionals do this. And what they do is get crash pads, and that means you rent a room or a house in the place where you are crew based, and it's furnished, it's basically like Airbnb. But it's kind of specifically designed for airline employees, and that the properties need to be within five miles of the airport, they need certain other equipment that's unique to the industry.

So, when he got the Detroit crew base, first we started looking for a crash pad for him, and then I saw how crappy all of them were. And I had been a landlord previously, because I own a place in New York. And so, we had the idea, you know what? We should just buy a house in Detroit and then we can be the landlords and have all of your fellow pilots renting from us. And so, we bought that first house, I want to say in 2014, and it was super cheap at that time in the suburbs of Detroit. I don't mess with like inner city, Detroit, even though I think it's great. We focus right by the airport. First house, he bought on the VA loan because he's a Navy veteran for like 50 grand and it rents, you know, we have a cash flow like $1,000 a month on that house because there's just such a high demand. So, the first house we got, was full within six days, and then we had a wait list eight deep. So then, we're like, "wow, we should get another house". So then, we got another house around the corner for like 30 grand, and then got another house around the corner for like 20 grand. Because once we realized the neighborhood, and each one making more and more profit, so, of the properties that we own in Metro Detroit, like in the suburbs of Detroit, I think all are fully paid for except for one. And that's the one that he got on the VA loan, that first one. But all the other ones, we just bought cash. It's been a great business model for us, and we have a similar model in Atlanta.

**Clark:**Wow, that's amazing. And it's something unique, we haven't talked about on the show. So, you're buying those houses cash for $30,000, give or take?

**Ericka:**Yeah, I mean, that window has closed. So, you know, at that point, Michigan was, I think one of the last states to recover from the housing depression. And so, we spent like, the whole weekend driving around by the airport because I knew we needed to find something within five miles of the airport, because when they are on reserve, which is kind of like being on call, they have to be able to get to the airport within an hour. So, we kept driving and driving and we just stumbled upon this beautiful little neighborhood with, I mean, it's got great school districts and all the houses are 50,000 or less. So, we just got really lucky, and now all those houses are going, of course, for like 100, 125, 200. But we just had that perfect window of time where the market hadn't rebounded, and it's a niche little community that, honestly, yeah, we were on the verge of giving up, like, you know what? You're just going to have to rent from someone because we couldn't find the right kind of neighborhood that we wanted. And then we stumbled upon this little pocket, and it's just a really sweet little neighborhood, right by the Detroit airport.

**Clark:**That's amazing. And you had the cash to do it, right?

**Ericka:**Yeah, yeah. So, we were fortunate to have the cash. Obviously, the first one, he did the VA loan so, we didn't have to put any money down, we just had to furnish it. And then, I pulled from my savings because I'm just like a crazy saver to buy the second one. And then, I'm trying to think, and then I sold a property in New York, and then we had the funds to buy properties, I guess three through seven from that.

**Clark:**That's pretty cool. And from being in the industry, you kind of knew the niche and you knew what people were looking for, it's kind of something that you know, us normal folk wouldn't really think about, right? I wouldn't know to do that.

**Ericka:**Yeah, yeah. It was kind of the perfect storm of like, opportunity and knowledge. Because if, you know, if it wasn't for him, I would have never known to do crash pads. And I think if it wasn't for me, he would never have thought to buy a house rather than just renting a room from somebody else. So, it worked out.

**Clark:**Right, and now you're trying to do the same thing in Atlanta?

**Ericka:**Yeah. So, we have-- so, we started trying to do the same model in Atlanta. Atlanta is much more competitive than Detroit. So, we got really lucky in Detroit like I said, we would open a house, it would fill up and then we'd have a wait list eight deep, so people were like fighting to get into our properties.

**Clark:**Wow, that's crazy.

**Ericka:**Yeah, it's crazy. And we could charge really, you know, premium prices. Atlanta, there's-- because it's such a big airline town because Delta is here, and a lot of other big airlines are based here. It's-- there's a lot of people doing crash pads so, we opened one house which is consistently full but then, we realized we don't have enough volume or energy to sustain multiple houses. The standards are also a lot higher for the residents in Atlanta so, we have the just the one crash pad in Atlanta and then we have a triplex that we rent out to just like regular tenants.

**Clark:**So, you have you have seven rental units, is that four single family homes and then one triplex to make up the seven?

**Ericka:**Yes.

**Clark:**Gotcha. Wow, and you guys manage them all in Detroit, or do you hire somebody else to kind of do all that work for you?

**Ericka:**So, I pretty much managed them all. It's harder for him obviously, because he's flying, you know, he can't be taking calls while he's flying a plane. So, I tend to be the main point of contact, and then we got really lucky in Detroit, where we found a guy who started off as our handyman, and he also mows our lawns and does car maintenance, like he's just amazing. So, he's kind of like our unofficial property manager out there.

**Clark:**Yeah, your go-to guy.

**Ericka:**Our go-to guy, and we also have a cleaning crew that comes once a month and we've-- like I said, we've just been so lucky because we've used the same cleaning crew for four years, same handyman, and when I say he does everything else. You know today I said, "Hey, can you go over there and spray for bugs?", because they saw some flies in the kitchen, he's like, "Sure, no problem", you know. And then, he's like, "Oh, I noticed that the shower head was messed up so, I went and got you a new shower head", and then he'll just tell me how much I owe him so.

**Clark:**And does he charge you by the hour, or job, or how do you kind of?

**Ericka:**He just charges-- he grossly undercharges us, I'll be honest. Everything in Detroit is super cheap, compared to other markets, I've been a-- you know, landlord in. And so, pretty much he just charges by the job, and I end up usually kind of rounding up because I feel like he never charges enough for what he does.

**Clark:**That's nice of you.

**Ericka:**Yeah, but that's probably why he's so loyal to us and-- because I make sure he's taken care of and, he will drop everything to do stuff on our units.

**Clark:**Yeah, it goes two ways. How much does it cost you to-- what is it? A two- or three-bedroom house, I assume

**Ericka:**All the houses are at least three bedrooms, yeah.

**Clark:**And how much does it cost you to furnish a house?

**Ericka:**Very little, surprisingly. And now in the day of like, you know, Facebook marketplace and Craigslist. So, the only thing I buy new are the beds and the mattresses, everything else, and I have a guy in Detroit who-- and someone in Atlanta who has, you know, like their wholesale, they give you really good prices on the beds and mattresses, but everything else, I buy, you know through thrifting. So, I usually give myself a budget of like 1500, this sounds crazy, but I can furnish a house from 1000-1500, and that includes pots and pans and decorating and all that stuff, so.

**Clark:**And all the beds?

**Ericka:**The beds? I would have to check my budget, sometimes I go bit over with the beds because like, yeah, we do buy the beds and the mattresses new. And we have a lot of beds because we have, you know, three to four beds per room.

**Clark:**So, are they renting it out monthly?

**Ericka:**They rent by the month. But most of our tenants, because of the way their work is, you know, if they're happy in the house, they'll stay. You know, we've had some people who've been in our pads for four years, and they just-- but, they're month to month tenants. And then some folks are only there for a couple months, and then they transfer base-- crew base, and then they move on to another pad. We've had people move from our crash pad in Detroit, and they get an Atlanta crew base, and move into our crash pad and Atlanta. Very interesting little world.

**Clark:**Yeah, just getting started on your own little empire of all the airports around the country, right?

**Ericka:**I wish, yeah. I think we're kind of tapped out, just the managing it all. And then, we both have pretty demanding, full time jobs. I'm kind of at my capacity of managing them at this point. But if we were to get a property manager, we could probably expand.

**Clark:**So, how much do one of those cash flow a month on average?

**Ericka:**So really, for us, for me-- to me, my rule of thumb was it has to cash flow $1000 a month to even be worth our time, which I know is crazy to other real estate investors, because most people look for 2 or 300 a door. But because we have, you know, like the property in Atlanta, we bought it for 56,000, and it makes about $2200 a month, gross. And then, because we bought it cash, it's pretty much all cash flow, we just pay taxes, insurance, and utilities. And then everything else is cash flow.

**Clark:**Wow, that's pretty amazing. And you shared with us before that, you guys have about 9000 a month from your rental properties in cash flow, is that accurate?

**Ericka:**Yeah, that's accurate.

**Clark:**So, Ericka, it's a pretty crazy story, right? You have to admit, you started out in New York, you were making about $35,000 a year, right? Which we know doesn't really go very far in New York, and now your income has substantially improved, you're mid 30's, really only-- what age did you start working professionally? 22, 23, 24ish?

**Ericka:**21, yeah. I started college early.

**Clark:**Okay, so 21, and just 14 years later, you're worth almost 1.5 million and you have $10,000 of passive income coming every month. I mean, it's crazy, right? What was the secret to you? Was it really moving your career? Was it looking outside of W2 jobs? What was kind of the mindset there that helped you get to where you are now?

**Ericka:**I think I've always just gravitated towards using intuition. And I know that sounds crazy. But you know, when I made the switch from journalism to market research, it was-- I was sitting next to someone at a networking event, and she was telling me about her job and I was like, "Wow, that sounds like something I would love to do", and then I sort of kept in contact with her and she called me two months later saying, "Oh, I have an opening on my team for research assistant". It was within the same company I was already working in. So, I think some of it for me has just been a combination of not being afraid to take risks. You know, most English majors don't end up in market research, it's usually math majors or business majors, economics majors, but I just went for it, got the job, struggled a lot my first couple years, because I didn't have the math and statistics background, but I figured it out, and it greatly increased my income. Because I realized-- I think, yeah, just not being afraid, if you realize the path, you're on, isn't giving you what you want, being willing to kind of change directions, and go where opportunity and your intuition leads you. And in every case, for me, that's kind of been the secret to me going from 35,000 to making six figures in the space of two or three years. And also, with the real estate, just, I get kind of like an intuitive hit when I'm in a neighborhood or a location where I feel like there's something special about this, and even if other people don't see it, I see it so, I'm going to put my money here. And so far for me, it's paid off because every place that I've invested ends up, you know, multiplying in value pretty quickly after I invest in it so.

**Clark:**Yeah, I really like it. It's an inspiring story and obviously you've stayed motivated and open, right? To other opportunities that have come your way, and I like what you said, kind of off air before we started that, W2 isn't necessarily the only option, right? Especially in the future maybe where, you know, it might be a little hard, stability wise, for some people in their jobs. I think, you know, I really like what you said about keeping your options open, and sometimes it may not be W2.

**Ericka:**Yeah, that's a really good point. And one that I try to share, you know, with my nieces, and my godchildren as they're coming up, like, don't assume that your job is going to be there for you. I've been laid off twice, and I'm only in my 30's, my husband's also been laid off twice. I saw both of my parents toil at companies for 30 years, and then my dad got laid off, I think 90 days before he was pension eligible, at like 67 or something like that, 60, I don't know. But I just have seen how-- corporate America is just not there for people the way some of us would like to believe so, I really think it's almost an imperative, now for millennials, or xennials, or Generation X, the folks coming up, you really do need to have more than one stream of income. And you might surprise yourself and find, like, what happened with me and my husband where, what kind of started off as kind of a hobby side hustle has now completely become something that could sustain us where we don't have to work anymore, if we don't want to. And there's a lot of freedom in that.

**Clark:**And is that part of the plan? Is retiring early or kind of growing this real estate and getting to a certain number, is that part of the plan or not so much?

**Ericka:**Not so much. Yeah, I did retire. So, I had a terrible, terrible job 2013-2014. And so, we moved back to Atlanta, moved into one of our rentals, like I mentioned, and I stopped working for a little while because I'm like, "I don't have to", and I got bored pretty quickly. I was volunteering a lot, just frankly, I like to work, I like making a steady check. So, to me, what it does, is it gives us freedom to choose the jobs we want to choose. And so, the job I'm in now is a bit different than what I've been doing for most of my career, same industry, but just different role. And I don't think I would have had the courage to take that sort of leap if I wasn't financially free to know, "Hey, if it doesn't work out, I'm cool. I can still cover my bills", you know?

**Clark:**Yeah, it definitely provides you some confidence, right?

**Ericka:**Absolutely.

**Clark:**Or at least reduces part of the worry financially,

**Ericka:** Yeah. But I see both of us working and he loves his job, I love my job. The freedom is just kind of, like you said, that sense of confidence. Like, I can choose my own destiny, whether it's this job or another job, but once it's not giving me joy, I can choose to take a break or not, I don't know. I just like working.

**Clark:**Yeah, I totally agree with you, you don't have to feel trapped in something that you don't enjoy doing.

**Ericka:**Absolutely.

**Clark:** So, shifting gears here, I guess not much shifting gears because it's still real estate, but different part here. You owned an apartment in New York that you bought and then sold, tell us, I think it's a really interesting story. So, tell us about that a little bit.

**Ericka:**Yeah, so I was 24 I think, and had just been saving, saving, saving. So, I wasn't making a ton, but I still, you know, live below my means and just saved a ton. And I never really understood what I was aiming for, but I've just always been a saver. And so, I had, I think about $25,000 saved. And then, I wanted to buy a house or something, but I just assumed I wouldn't be able to. And then, I stumbled upon an ad on Craigslist, of all places, for a co-op in Manhattan in Harlem, for, it was listed for $140,000 a year, not a year-- $140,000. And I went to look at it on my lunch break and loved it. But it's sad, I couldn't even afford 140,000 at that point, because I was making like, I think $38,000 a year at that point, maybe 40 something. And so, I told the broker, I was like, "I love this place. I would totally buy it, but I don't think it's in my budget", because even though the cost was low, some of you may know, co-ops and New York have high maintenance fees. So, the maintenance fees, or what you might most people might know, as HOA fees are like $900 a month. Yeah, it's a killer. And for me, I was-- I think at that point, paying rent of about 800 a month. And so, the jump of just having my co-op fees be 900 plus my mortgage was going to be, I think, if I bought it for 140, my mortgage would have been like 700, it was just out of my budget. And I had student loans still at that point. So, but I hit it off with the broker, whatever, we-- actually it was her husband, it was the owner's husband who showed it to me on my lunch break and his lunch break. So then, fast forward a few days later, he text-- the broker, he texted me or emailed me, we didn't have text then, and he was like, "Well, what if we lowered the price to $100,000?". And I was like, "Well, I think I could afford that". So, I ran the numbers, I went, and I really had to pray on it because I was, you know, scared to jump from renting to paying that amount. But I went for it and the Co-op board approved me and the next thing you knew, I was the owner of a two-bedroom Co-op in Manhattan in Harlem. And it was a great apartment, thousand square feet, park view like, I love that apartment, I miss it to this day. And it was a great financial decision for me, and I think a big turning point. Because from there, I kind of stumbled into being a landlord and really realized the power of real estate as an investment vehicle.

**Clark:**Ericka, you've got this great story. You've done really well with real estate, you've got a great niche. You're young, you got great careers, where do you kind of go from here?

**Ericka:**I think from here, it's, you know, giving back and building more wealth, so we're at 1.4 million, I would love to be at 10 million by the time I'm 50 and then be able to give that to my community. And also, you know, I'm African American, my husband is Caribbean American, for us just spreading this kind of gospel of the fact that look, you can build wealth. And you can do it in our neighborhoods, we've traditionally bought in neighborhoods that are historically minority, and have built great wealth doing that, or I would say modest wealth, because we're not that wealthy. And then also, just establishing generational wealth, so that the generations coming behind us have the knowledge that we didn't have and, can build wealth for themselves and also have freedom to choose paths that they would want to choose, because they have the financial freedom to do that.

**Clark:**Yeah, and when you say you'd like to get to 10 by 50, what is your portfolio going to look like kind of along the way? Are you going to concentrate on real estate more? Are you going to continue invest in equity markets, or what's that make up going to look like?

**Ericka:**That's a great question. I'm still trying to figure that out, I'm still newer to like the index fund. You know, we both always invested in our-- and maxing those out, but I've discovered the whole world of index funds more recently in the last couple years, so, and it seems to be lucrative. So, I'm going to stick with that and also with real estate, but unfortunately right now, we're just not seeing the deals in real estate. So, like I said, I follow opportunity. So, I like to just keep my cash ready, and wherever the next opportunity presents itself, I'll kind of follow that trail. So, I really don't know what's next. Right now, we're holding steady with real estate, still keeping an eye out for deals, but just haven't found any in a couple of years. And so instead, right now, the focus has been more on growing the equity portfolio, primarily focused on index funds.

**Clark:**How are the conversations with you and your husband? Maybe even when you first were starting out as a relates to personal finance and investment strategy?

**Ericka:** I don't know. I mean, we didn't really talk a ton about personal finance in the beginning other than the fact you know, I'm a saver, he quickly saw that, he would make fun of my frugality.

**Jace:**Okay, okay. There we go.

**Clark:**You got to be careful here.

**Ericka:**Exactly, yeah, when I was making six figures and driving a Kia, he was like, "you need to get your life together", especially in Atlanta where people are very much caring about what you drive and all that stuff. So, I feel like we balance each other out because I can tend to be super frugal, and he tends to be a bit more of a spender, but we balance each other out so that we're saving, but we also are enjoying what we've worked for. Because that's his thing, it's like, it doesn't make sense to work super hard and not enjoy the fruits of our labor because we could die tomorrow. So, we balance each other out on that level. And then I think we're both very similar in that we want to build wealth and have nice things, but we also want to be responsible and help other people as well. So, we both have that kind of service element to our spirits as well, I think.

**Clark:**Yeah, that's awesome. Do your friends and family and people you associate with know your level of wealth right now?

**Ericka:**Most of them don't. Yeah, and that's where it's tricky because I want to tell people like, hey, we definitely want some of our friends to invest in real estate. So, one of my best friends here in Atlanta, her and her husband just have been doing an Airbnb for about a year and they're about to do their second one, they actually might rent one of our units, and Airbnb it because she's amazing at Airbnb. She's an interior decorator. But for the most part, it's really tricky because you want to tell people or share your story, but not come across like you're bragging. And so, that's been the fine line that I've tried to walk. He definitely doesn't tell anyone about what's going on with us financially. But I will share with people about the crash pads or index funds just because I wish people had shared you know, I didn't know about index funds until I was, you know, in my mid 30's, I never heard of an index fund. Or, you know, I just didn't know anything about this thing. So, I feel like the more we can share with other people in our circle, we can help everybody get wealthier.

**Clark:**Yeah, kind of like rising the tide all across the board. So, just curious, you know, because of how you all have operated and the fact that you kind of are a little bit different in what you share now, how were each of you raised? And how did that kind of play into how you look and think about money now?

**Ericka:**We were raised differently. And I think that's probably why I'm a saver and he's a spender. Because my family was definitely not flashy, like my parents both worked really hard, solidly middle class. But you know, my dad drove the same Dodge Caravan until I graduated high school, well, for a long time, let's just put it that way. Like, we always lived below our means. Whereas I think his family was more, I remember before, the first time I went to meet his family, he had been telling me all this stuff about how they struggled and all this, and then we pull up to this mansion, which from my perspective, was a mansion. And I'm like, "this is where you live? This is where you were struggling?". So, it's like, different. You know, yeah, it's like they live in a mansion, but don't you dare cut on the air conditioning because they can barely cover the utility bill, do you know what I mean?

**Clark:**Yeah, yeah. So, poor a little bit maybe,

**Ericka:**Exactly, like people are more focused on looking rich than actually being rich. And I feel like my family, they weren't rich either, but they did not ever care about looking rich. And I think that's helped me have more of a saver's mindset, but we both have that desire to attain wealth. And that's something we had in common with our upbringings, so we both have very loving, hardworking families. And we had that in common as well. So, it balanced out.

**Clark:**Do you guys have; besides, I know you have one mortgage left, is that right? On one of the rental homes or all paid off?

**Ericka:**We actually have two mortgages, so one, the VA one that he has on one of the properties in Michigan and then we have a loan on the triplex.

**Clark:**Gotcha.

**Ericka:**But everything else is paid off, including our primary residence. Yeah.

**Clark:**And then any other debt? You have student loans or anything else?

**Ericka:**No, we've gotten rid of all of our student loans, no car payments. So, we are definitely, the goal is to be debt free. He's less concerned about that VA loan, just because VA loans are just super easy, but-- and it's such a small amount. But I would love to get the-- let the tenants pay off the triplex, and then we'll officially be debt free.

**Clark:** And if you're comfortable sharing, how much in student loans did you guys have?

**Ericka:**So, I had, I graduated undergrad with about, I want to say 10,000 in loans. And again, that was a difference between he and I, because my parents helped me with college, I had to pay my way, and I worked into my portion too, but my parents were really great and shouldered a big portion of that burden. Whereas for him, his parents hadn't put away any money for him. So, he went to the Navy, went through college that way, so he didn't have any undergraduate loans. But becoming a pilot is really expensive. So, he had like $100,000 worth of loans from that. But he was able to get those paid off. So, he doesn't have any loans, any student debt left.

**Clark:**That's pretty amazing, 1.4 million and you paid off 110,000.

**Ericka:**Yeah, he got lucky with-- the company that had his student loans actually was bought by another company. And they were trying to write off all their debt. So, they actually let him write off, and I've never heard of this happening for anyone else before since, but he was able to negotiate a write off on his student loans. I still don't know how that worked. And so, he was able to pay them a lump sum, and they just forgave the whole deck. This was right before we got married, or right around the time we got married, so about eight years ago, that he was able to do that so.

**Clark:**That's awesome. Good for him. What age, do you guys remember, what age were you when you hit your first million?

**Ericka:**It was recently so, I would say, I don't like to share ages, but he was probably 36.

**Clark:**That's young, really young.

**Ericka:**Yeah. I mean, we're, like I said, we're in our 30's. So, we, yeah.

**Clark:**So, you were probably like, mid 20's.

**Eicka:**Exactly, you understand? Yeah.

**Clark:** So, just before we get in the mistakes and kind of the last pieces of advice, let's just end with some rapid-fire questions here. So, what are the most expensive jeans or pair of pants you've ever purchased?

**Ericka:**Probably about $100 for a pair of slacks for work.

**Clark:**Okay, most expensive shoes?

**Ericka:**So, I will splurge sometimes on shoes. I think I paid $200 for a pair of boots once.

**Clark:** Okay, most expensive car?

**Ericka:**I did buy a used BMW. This was my husband pressuring me because he was, you know, making fun of the fact that I was driving a Kia and I worked at an ad agency at the time where it was considered a problem that I drove a car that you know, I would, you know, be going to client meetings and so, I actually felt like I had to buy a nicer car. So, I spent about, this is me excusing my one little luxury, and so that car, it's a 2011 BMW, I believe I paid 26,000 for it.

**Clark:**Okay, what's worth spending more money on to you? What are you not so frugal on?

**Ericka:**Yeah, I splurge on travel. Like, I love to travel, and I will definitely look for the finer hotel or the nicer room with the better food. I also love to eat. So, like, we definitely splurge on eating out at nice restaurants, things like that.

**Clark:** So, you got to ask, what's your favorite place that you guys have been?

**Ericka:**Oh, in terms of travel destinations?

**Clark:** Yeah.

**Ericka:**I love South Africa, I'm obsessed with it. Yeah, that's my favorite place.

**Clark:** Awesome. High school and college GPA, if you can remember.

**Ericka:**I think I was like a solid 3.6 in both high school and college.

**Clark:**Okay. And then household spending a year?

**Ericka:**Our expenses are super low because we don't have debt. So, we are at, I would say, if we're being frugal, like the frugal budget, would be like 2500 a month so that's like 30,000 a year in household spending.

**Clark:**Wow. So, you guys really keep it down?

**Ericka:**Yeah, I mean, we don't have any bills like we have no, I mean, the mortgages are paid for by the tenants, the two that we have. And then our primary is paid off. We, you know, there's really nothing to spend on other than travel and we fly for free because he works for an airline.

**Jace:**You're going to end up getting a new BMW, probably because of this.

**Ericka:**That's how he thinks, he would love that, and I'm like, "there's nothing wrong with the one we have".

**Clark:** What is he driving?

**Ericka:**Well, so we actually share that car because I work from home. And he just has to go to and from the airport. So, we share the BMW.

**Clark"**So, you just have one car?

**Ericka:**We just have one car.

**Clark:**Awesome. Any books or websites, anything that's kind of been influential to you, or?

**Ericka:**Oh, there's so many. I think the Four-Hour Workweek was a huge turning point for us because he read it first, and was really inspired by it and then started side hustling. And that's when we realized we could really have more control over our income beyond like the traditional W2 income. And then from there, it's mainly blogs and podcasts. We-- like I said, are big followers of the Financial Independence Retire Early movement or the fire movement. So, Afford Anything, Mr. Money Mustache, Choosify, Checks and Balances, Rich and Regular. And then for real estate, Bigger Pockets has been a huge source of advice for us as well.

**Clark:**Awesome. So, just in closing here, what-- are there any big financial mistakes you've made or any mistakes that you've made that you wish to warn people about or anything that you wish you knew earlier on?

**Ericka:**I guess those would be two different answers. So, my biggest financial mistake would definitely be selling my apartment in New York, because I really do believe that it will one day be a million-dollar apartment. So, I'm kicking myself for selling it before it came to that point. Just because it's in Manhattan, like I was very stupid to sell that apartment, and it was cash flowing a lot of money every month.

**Clark:** And we never finished, sorry to interrupt, we never finished telling people that you bought it for 100 and then you sold it for 400.

**Ericka:**I sold it for 400, yeah, after it was cash flowing. Like, I mean, the mortgage was 350, and my tenants, the last tenants I had, were paying $2500 a month. So, it was cash flowing like crazy. And then you have to add in the HOA, or the co-op fee. So, my total payments on it were like 1350 a month, and then the tenants were paying 2500 a month. And I was still able to go there and crash and stay when I was in New York because they were family friends. So, it was a pretty sweet deal. And I was very stupid to sell it. But life, you know, you just live, and you learn and now you learn. For me, I don't like to sell real estate, I prefer to just hold it till I die, I think. Because I regret anything I've sold. We have another property we bought that I sold, and I regret that one too. So, I think I just don't like to sell real estate.

**Clark:**Gotcha. So, just in closing here, what's kind of the last piece of advice if any, that you give to people that are looking to be in a similar position as you?

**Ericka:** I would say just you know, push past the fear, like just because something seems a little bit unfamiliar, don't be afraid to go for it. Because, really, fortune favors the bold. And if you are willing to take a bit of a risk, obviously educate yourself, do your research, but then make the leap because I see so many people who just hold back and get into that analysis paralysis. And sometimes you just got to make the leap. And the worst-case scenario is, you make a mistake, and you learn from it, and then you don't do that again. But I think people are often way too hesitant to just go for it when an opportunity is in front of them. And they've kind of talked themselves out of it. So, I would say just trust that the universe is going to put some great things in your path. And if your intuition is saying, "Yeah, this sounds good", and you do some data crunching, and it seems good, I would say just go for it

**Clark:**Yeah and, take the risk. Also, if you're willing to, I want you to just share the story that you shared with us about when you are an Uber and your Uber driver picked you guys up and said that he picks up millionaires a bunch of time in the neighborhood, you remember that story?

**Ericka:**Yes, yes. That actually is what inspired me to reach out to you guys. Because it dawned on me. So, like I said, my husband and I are both black Americans. And we live in a neighborhood that is a pretty wealthy neighborhood in Atlanta. And so, we had a Lyft driver who was also a black American pick us up. And he was kind of talking about, "Oh, I pick up millionaires all the time in this neighborhood" and talking about, "they are so like this, and they are so like that, and this is where they hang out". And my husband and I just kind of looked at each other and winked, because it's like we're millionaires, but nobody, including other black people, like nobody would look at us and think that we're millionaires. And it's funny, and it's sad at the same time, because I think there needs to be more visibility and hope for people to know, you can look like us and be wealthy. And so, that's kind of why I want to share a little bit about my path and hopefully inspire other people to know that it's possible. You know, and it's not hard, there was nothing difficult or even brain science or brain surgery ish about this, it's just, save your money, invest when you can, and the rest kind of take it takes care of itself.

**Clark:**Yeah, it's an inspiring story. So, you know, we're appreciative you reached out and took the time to come on and humbling that you guys are going around and trying to teach others and help people where you can. So, thanks again for making the time. That's Ericka, net worth of $1.4 million. Thank you so much for coming on and sharing your story.

**Ericka:**My pleasure.

**Narrator:**Thanks for listening to the Millionaires Unveiled Podcast with Clark Sheffield and Jace Mattinson. For more stories, investment opportunities and information, check out our website at millionairesunveiled.com. See you next time when you'll hear from another everyday millionaire.