

Fran Drescher: Actress to Activist

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Intro [00:00:01] Welcome fellow seekers of the extraordinary to our shared quest to understand how we can achieve our fullest potential. May we always have the courage and wisdom to learn from those who have something to teach. Join me now in Seeking the Extraordinary.

Brad Levin [00:00:19] Hi, everyone, and welcome to Seeking the Extraordinary. I'm Brad Levin, managing director of The Colony Group, coming to you today from beautiful Calabasas, California, where I'm filling in at the host mic for our chief seeker of the extraordinary Michael Nathanson. My guest today needs no introduction. She is the incomparable Fran Drescher. Hi, Fran.

Fran Drescher [00:00:40] Hi, how are you?

Brad Levin [00:00:42] I'm great. How are you doing?

Fran Drescher [00:00:44] I'm wonderful. Thank you.

Brad Levin [00:00:46] Well, I know that you are incredibly busy these days, so I want to thank you so much for taking the time to be with me today. And so many people will know you because you became famous from your seven year role on The Nanny. And more recently, people will know you from your incredible work that you've done as the president of SAG-AFTRA, which we're going to talk about a little bit today, too. And some people will also know you as a New York Times bestselling author, not only of one book, but three books. And fewer people still will know you as I do as the founder and leader of the Cancer Schmancer Foundation. You're also a humanitarian, and now you're a hero to so many people in the world of entertainment. But today I really want our listeners to get to know who Fran Drescher is; what led you to become who you are today and what your quest is at this point. So, Fran, what I'd like to do is to take you back to the beginning. Tell me a little about your upbringing and then how you got started in the field of acting.

Fran Drescher [00:01:46] Well, I come from a very provincial background in a very working class neighborhood that actually was a union town. It was the electricians union that dominated the community, even though my dad was not working as an electrician. But I felt at a very young age that it was something that I could be good at. And I used to watch a lot of television sitcoms and particularly reruns like I Love Lucy. And I was just very impressed by the comedy, the physical comedy. I just enjoyed the whole vibe of it, and I thought that I would be good at it. And when I was probably in junior high, now they call it middle school, I think that I was thinking I could be a writer, I could be an actor, I could be a hairdresser. There were a lot of things that I had an interest in, and eventually in my life I became all of the above. But at the time, I thought that the thing that I kind of enjoyed the most and felt the least like work was acting. And so that was what I pursued when I went into high school and I went to a special school that dedicated half of the day to studying theater or any career was a career oriented school. My sister went to prep nursing and I did theater career and also studied in the city at private acting schools. And that was really kind of the beginning of my career. By the time I think I was a freshman in college, I started working as a professional actor. And so that was when I dropped out of college and went to beauty culture school at night so that I could have something to fall back on if the acting didn't work out. But thankfully it did.

Brad Levin [00:04:04] How did you get your first role when you were still there in New York? Was that after you came out here to L.A.?

Fran Drescher [00:04:09] No. My first role was a small part in Saturday Night Fever.

Brad Levin [00:04:15] One of the best, the best classics of all time.

Fran Drescher [00:04:17] Yes, it was. And I was a big John Travolta fan. He was on Welcome Back Kotter at the time. And I had the opportunity to audition a few times for that movie and different roles. And ultimately, I got the part of Connie who walks up to him at the disco and says, "Are you as good as good in bed as you are on the dance floor?" And he starts to dance with me to show his brother who was there, what he can do. And he didn't think I was a very good dancer. So he kind of spins me off and he goes into his famous solo, but he defiantly stands on the stage watching him. And subsequently, all these years later, I just watched a episode of I think it was American Experience and it was focusing on the disco era. And there they showed the famous solo dance of John Travolta. And there I was standing in the background, a teenager watching him. And so that was the beginning of my professional career. Prior to that, I had just done commercials and some background work. Back then, they called it extra work.

Brad Levin [00:05:39] Well, it's amazing that that was your first real professional big gig. And that's one of the most iconic scenes in the history of film.

Fran Drescher [00:05:49] It's true. That movie is like a time capsule of a period in American history that was very special and very wonderful, and it had such an amazing soundtrack that went with it. The whole thing came together so beautifully. And I think to this day, it's still one... It's become a classic. It has; it certainly has endured the test of time.

Brad Levin [00:06:22] And I'll also remember you from another movie now, one of your first roles. But I was watching this with my son not too long ago, and I had to laugh when you came on because I didn't remember you were in this movie, This is Spinal Tap.

Fran Drescher [00:06:34] Oh, yeah. Bobbi Fleckman.

Brad Levin [00:06:37] Yes.

Fran Drescher [00:06:38] Yeah, Yeah. I actually I was supposed to shoot a small part in the sequel to that this past summer, but ironically, the strike made that impossible, and I don't know when they'll pick it up again, but, you know, it couldn't have been done...

Brad Levin [00:06:58] That would be awesome if that happens. Yeah. So talk about the creation of The Nanny and how that came about. Well.

Fran Drescher [00:07:05] I think that I had done a pilot that I felt wasn't as good as it could have been, and I didn't really love the part that I was getting cast as. It was always like a third banana and comedy relief character. And I decided that I needed to get on the inside in a big way and start writing and producing my own projects. And so Peter, my husband at the time, and he still remains my best friend and partner, we started to think about what would be good vehicles for me. And then by a twist of fate, I had just finished a short lived series called Princesses with Twiggy and Julie Hagerty and myself

for CBS. And then right after that, they cast me in a soap opera spoof also for CBS. And then I thought, well, I was invited to visit a girlfriend in France and I was going to cash in some frequent flier miles and go see her because I had to wait for the pilot season to start up again. And it was on that plane to France that I ran into the president of CBS. Over the course of the 9.5 hours, I talked him into letting me pitch some of my ideas to them. And we got back and finally he said, okay, when we're both back in L.A., call my office and I'll set you up a pitch meeting with the head of our comedy development. And so I called Peter, who is still back in L.A., and I said, This is amazing. We have to start thinking about what we're going to pitch to him. But it wasn't until I visited Twiggy on that trip and was spending time with her 12 year old daughter that I realized that when she said... We were touring London and she said, my new shoes are hurting me. And I thought, Oh God, don't tell me she wants me to take her home. So I tell her to just step on the backs of them. And she said, Well, break them. And I said, Now no. Break them in. Uh huh. And I couldn't get this relationship out of my head because it felt funny to me. I wasn't really saying something that was good for her. It was telling us something that was good for me. Yeah. And I caught Peter that night and I said, I think I have an idea for the show we could pitch to CBS. What do you think about a spin on The Sound of Music? Only instead of Julie Andrews, I come to the door. Oh, wow. And he has a very good sense for these things. He only thought for a moment and said, That's it. That's the one we'll pitch to CBS as soon as you get back. Well, refine the pitch and go in. And that was the beginning of the beginning.

Brad Levin [00:10:31] That's amazing, because when you think about that and I listen to this story, I mean, it's just a string of a couple of chance meetings and events that turned out to be so serendipitous that...

Fran Drescher [00:10:43] You find light often offers you opportunities. But you have to be open to seeing them. Doors open all the time. But if you're very stuck in one direction, you may not see an opportunity. And it just came together very fortuitously, for which I will be forever grateful.

Brad Levin [00:11:11] I love that insight. And I really have lived my life the same way over the last few years. And I don't know if you're familiar with a book, a book that's been really meaningful to me. It's called The Surrender Experiment by Michael Singer. And it's a story of a guy's own life and his journey to incredible success that just came about as a result of being open, open to listening to the messages that come to us that we can choose to listen to and explore. Or we could choose to turn away from. But if we allow ourselves to be open to the possibilities, what can happen can really be quite tremendous as you as you experience in your own life.

Fran Drescher [00:11:51] I love the sound of that. You'll have to text me as well.

Brad Levin [00:11:56] But let's talk about the other side of some of the things that you went through, because it was not all a bed of roses. Right? There were some some definite challenges that you went through and some unfortunate experiences that also shaped who you become today and I think made you a woman of incredible strength. You want to talk about some of those things?

Fran Drescher [00:12:15] Well, no one leaves this planet unscathed. And yeah, bad things happen to good people, as you well know. Yeah. And I was a victim of a violent crime. I was raped at gunpoint by a man I did not know who was on parole in my own home. And that's an experience that changes your life. You... And pick up the pieces and go on. If you are lucky enough to live through it. But it's always just beneath the surface.

And it's a journey to find yourself again in spite of that kind of a violation. And I wrote about it, frankly, in my book. That was Enter Whining. And that was the chapter. Bad things happen to good people. And many, many people asked me to sign that chapter specifically when they have the book and and happened to cross paths with me. And then I became a cancer survivor. It took me three years and eight doctors to get diagnosed with uterine cancer. And I think that. Part of that was because I didn't really unpack the pain that the rape had caused me. So it was almost poetic that my that the cancer that I got ended up in my uterus.

Brad Levin [00:13:56] Yes.

Fran Drescher [00:13:58] I think that when you experience trauma and you hold it inside, that it's going to become physical wise in your body. And I was still at a place where I wasn't connecting to my vulnerability. I was one of these people that likened myself to being a superwoman and being strong for everyone else. And I just didn't let myself completely feel the pain. And so eventually I ended up having uterine cancer. And because I was young and thin, which is not typical of women who get uterine cancer, they kept thinking that I was perimenopausal.

Brad Levin [00:14:57] Mm hmm.

Fran Drescher [00:14:58] For two years and eight doctors, they were trying different hormone treatments, the last of which actually exacerbated my condition because it had estrogen. And that estrogen is like a poison to someone that actually has uterine cancer. So radical hysterectomy became my cure. And I had not had children by that point and then was unable to, obviously, after that. But I was grateful to be alive. And I gave birth to a book instead, talking about my experience and empowering women on how to navigate through a journey like this and maybe even find yourself as I did on the other side and.

Brad Levin [00:15:59] Now, was that book, was that Enter Whining, or was that your second book, Cancer Schmancer?

Fran Drescher [00:16:03] Cancer Schmancer was the second book. Yes. I allude to the rape in the first book. In the second book too. But it was more about that. I was still trying to I was still struggling with being vulnerable. And I don't think that I used the rape as the opportunity to conquer. My inability to be vulnerable, I contacted away. And then as life does, if you don't learn the lesson, it comes back around. Yeah, and maybe even harder. So the cancer was just that I could not do that on my own. All the old things that I would rely on to act strong. I couldn't muster it up. I actually realized that. This was my opportunity to just let it all hang out and ask people to not only support me, but sometimes carry me.

Brad Levin [00:17:34] So it sounds like you went from one extreme to the other. You were hiding from yourself, your own emotions and the pain of this experience. And then you went to the other extreme of deciding to be radically vulnerable and open to to share that experience with other people, it sounds like.

Fran Drescher [00:17:54] Yes. And that that was actually a silver lining to getting the cancer, because I, I was forced to experience letting down that mask of being a superwoman. I was the only one out of everyone I knew that had cancer. So I had to reconcile with myself that I was. The same as everyone else, and I needed to help myself and not worry about if my disease was making other people uncomfortable or if my

vulnerability was spoiling it for someone else. Yeah, I didn't have to wear the mask anymore and that was very freeing. And it also helped me to develop into a more well-rounded human being.

Brad Levin [00:18:55] Right.

Fran Drescher [00:18:55] One of the things ... I was able to really feel my own pain. I, I don't think I was able to be as deeply empathic towards others pains as I am now.

Brad Levin [00:19:13] Hmm. That's wonderful that you had that insight. And one of the things that I've heard you talk about is you've used this phrase, turn your pain into purpose. So talk about what happened as a result of this experience and what that led you to.

Fran Drescher [00:19:28] Well, I've always been and I was very famous by the time I got diagnosed with cancer. And I've always felt that if you don't leverage your fame on behalf of the greater good, you're really wasting it. So I always go to the mat for those that were marginalized, for the LGBTQ community, for civil liberties, arts in education, environmental issues, and was very frank about my Vic being a victim of a violent crime. So women could appreciate that even someone like me, something like this could happen to you. So after the cancer. I remember thinking to myself that I was going to write a book. So what happened to me doesn't happen to other people by means of misdiagnosis and mistreatment. But for many, though not my situation, because I was lucky with the kind of cancer I got, which was extremely slow growing. So even after two years of escalating symptoms, I was still in stage one.

Brad Levin [00:20:49] Wow.

Fran Drescher [00:20:50] But I wasn't...

Brad Levin [00:20:51] Incredibly lucky that that was the case.

Fran Drescher [00:20:53] That's right. Because had it been ovarian cancer, I'd probably be dead today. So I wanted to make sure that we should empower people towards early detection. That was the cornerstone of what became the Cancer Schmancer movement. But in the book, it was important to me that people really appreciated the journey that I was on, that I didn't accept what a doctor said. If it didn't seem like it was working or I felt like I was being placated too, or I felt like I was being dismissed somehow, I went on to another doctor and another doctor and another until I had gone to eight doctors over two years. And I wanted the book to empower people to challenge their physician and for them to grow as human beings. And what I coined, medical consumers don't trust anyone with your life. And do your research. Surround yourself with friends and family who are going to be strong for you and not fall apart because they're so worried or so upset that you are sick. I mean, bless their hearts. But that's not what you need when you're going through this. And so I started to. Make lists and to help people and speak publicly. The book became a New York Times best seller. And one thing led to another. I became active in Washington. I passed got a bill passed the first Gynecologic Cancer Education and Awareness Act of its kind in U.S. history, passed by unanimous consent. And that was the beginning of my kind of involvement in Washington. And I, I was appointed the very position of public diplomacy envoy by the US State Department and was flown around the world to our allied nations and military bases talking about taking control of your body, recognizing there early warning whispers, knowing the tests that are available because

they may not even be on the menu. That's right at your doctor's office if, for example, your health insurance doesn't cover it. So there's a lot of proactive behavior that needed to be cultivated, still needs to be cultivated. And that movement, the Kansas me and some movement kind of started with that as the cornerstone and then morphed into what the question, why did we get sick in the first place? And is there anything that we can do to keep our immune system operating at an optimum? And what compromises our immune system? Because when you have cancer, something failed in your body and you're either not paying attention to a long history of low level information or you are not paying attention to very subtle early warning whispers and being proactive about it, or you're not managing your stress, you're not unpacking your trauma.

Brad Levin [00:24:42] Like you went through yourself.

Fran Drescher [00:24:44] That's right. Yeah. You're not looking at your environment at home, which often is more toxic than living across the street from an oil refinery. And all of those things contribute to your. This is. Yeah. And that became a real driving narrative for the Cancer Schmancer movement.

Brad Levin [00:25:08] It's really amazing. I mean, you said so many incredible things in the last few minutes. I want to go back to a few of those items I want to touch on. One is you really talked about the need to be your own advocate when it comes to your health. And I think that for a lot of people, even today, that's a foreign concept. We go to these doctors. They give us a prognosis and we just say, I'm just going to trust my doctor because he or she knows best. And it's a mistake to do that because as you experienced, they're not God and they don't have all the answers. And fortunately, I got exposed to you and came to begin to get to know you through my wife, Jennifer, when unfortunately, she was diagnosed with cancer in 2015. And shortly after that we found out that she had stage three breast cancer and a very close friend of ours invited us to go to your Cancer Schmancer Health Summit here in L.A. And that really exposed us to a whole new world of things that we needed to know about in order to become better armed at being her own best advocates. And I would really, honestly credit you for her being alive today, because there were so many things that we learned that we chose to pursue only because we were exposed to that education through what we got introduced through you. And as a result of that, we become very passionate followers of the work that you do and the education that you provide. And of course, you're now part of your roundtable supporting Cancer Schmancer, which is which has been wonderful for us.

Fran Drescher [00:26:39] And we're so grateful for that.

Brad Levin [00:26:41] Thank you. Let's talk about in America, what are we doing wrong today? In your opinion? What are the biggest mistakes that we're making in the health care system?

Fran Drescher [00:26:51] In the health care system. I would say that it's too reductionist. The whole medical community waits until you get sick and then tries to fix the end symptom. And really, our bodies are very complex systems within systems and functional medicine does the opposite of that. It looks for the hidden whispers that could eventually turn into a serious disease, but corrects the problem at a really early point because they're looking for causation.

Brad Levin [00:27:35] Right.

Fran Drescher [00:27:35] And I believe that functional medicine is going to take a very strong hold in how we treat ourselves, how we look at the body as we move deeper into the 21st century.

Brad Levin [00:27:54] You talked about your belief that your your trauma from your rape and not dealing with that pain effectively led to your cancer. And I think a lot of people might be really kind of perplexed by that. What would be the connection between a violent event and cancer? And you really said that it's about inflammation, low level inflammation that persists over time. And what I've learned from you is that that stress we're not dealt with properly leads to inflammation. And cancer is the end stage of inflammation that's not dealt with. So that's an incredible insight because we think oftentimes that the source of cancer is probably something a lot more easily explained than that. And here in America, we're really killing ourselves as a result of being overstressed and the diets that we eat and so many other things that we expose ourselves to in terms of the toxicity in our environment. What do you think that we're doing right? What are some of the things that we're starting to learn from in terms of our mistakes? And we're doing a little bit better than you've seen in the past?

Fran Drescher [00:28:59] Well, I think that the awareness of our environment is something that has been more prevalent in culture and amongst young people. And I think that eating organic is something that more people are trying to do as it becomes more available in less expensive. Yeah. Options like Walmart and yeah. So yeah, all have food that's available, that's organic. And I personally refrain from eating industrial farmed foods because as I always say, you are what you eat and you are what you're eating is eating.

Brad Levin [00:29:58] Yeah, nobody thinks about that.

Fran Drescher [00:30:01] We have all of the chemicals, all of the we own plants, all of the growth hormones and and really bad food that's fed to livestock that they shouldn't be eating in the first place, are transferring into our body and ultimately impacting our long term health and well-being. So products that we use to clean to garden with are highly toxic. Yeah. Personal care items. We have to start thinking about things that are made with plants and are considered eco friendly are probably a much safer bet than things that have a level of chemicals in it that are actually creating a lot of dysfunction in your body.

Brad Levin [00:31:00] And fortunately, as you said, these options are becoming more and more prevalent, and these didn't really exist even a few years ago. And that's simply because the ... the structure of our economy, the the the conglomerates that control our economy had no reason to offer these alternatives until the public really spoke up and said, no, we need better options. And as you said, when you vote with your wallet, these companies will listen and they will change. And we're starting to see that happen, aren't we?

Fran Drescher [00:31:33] That's true. I mean, if we all stopped drinking cola tonight, they'd stop making it tomorrow. And it wouldn't matter who was in the White House or any legislation that didn't get passed, because the bottom line is the bottom line. And we as consumers wield a lot of influence on big business industry. And at the end of the day, they don't want to kill us. They want to sell us. But anything that we're willing to buy, which for the most part is anything. I feel like there is so much toxicity all around us and mindless spending. That it will take many more years and a lot more people like me talking about what needs to be done. Even things like. Wife II, I think is has a negative impact on the

body. Microwaves have a negative impact on the body, always wearing rubber soled shoes and never walking on soil and feeling the earth's and its...

Brad Levin [00:32:52] Grounding.

Fran Drescher [00:32:53] Has exactly has a negative impact. And so there's a lot about the technological advancements that I think are having it taking its toll on our species and other species as well. I actually shut my wi fi off at night and I have actively working Ethernet throughout my house and my smart TV is plugged into an Ethernet. It is not dependent on wi fi. I don't even have the wi fi option turned on.

Brad Levin [00:33:29] Wow. So there's a lot of things that we could do. So many things we could change about our lives to insulate ourselves against the disease, as you described it. But if there was one thing that you would suggest people start with, the one thing that you think could be most easily accomplished starting tomorrow, what would be your piece of advice that you think would be of most value to people?

Fran Drescher [00:33:52] Well. Oh, I mean, in a word, detox your home.

Brad Levin [00:33:57] Okay.

Fran Drescher [00:33:58] That is. And we have a very progressive program, the detox, your home program. But almost everything that most Americans are currently buying is really not good for you. Yeah. You have to start looking at everything that you bring into your home through a different lens and be far more discerning, and that will help your body. Be stronger to resist certain interferences from the outside world.

Brad Levin [00:34:41] Well, it's incredible to to see and be part of what you've done as a result of your own pain and turning that into purpose, into helping so many, potentially millions of people improve our lives and protect ourselves against cancer. You've just demonstrated such incredible leadership and humanitarian capabilities, and most recently, your latest iteration of leadership has been as the president of Sag-aftra. And it's been incredible to watch you. I've seen some of the interviews and I've been blown away by the strength of your leadership. And my understanding is that just a few days ago, after a 118 day strike between the union and the studios, you've reached a tentative agreement. Can you just talk briefly about that and what what this means and then also what it means for you in this role?

Fran Drescher [00:35:31] Well, I knew that we were at a serious crossroads in our own history in this industry because with the advent of streaming as entertainment and technology in the digital age, I felt like it was really important that the member body get much many more protections and also that a new stream of revenue be incorporated into a new contract. Because I saw a disconnect between the old contract that was forged in 1964 air television and today, where the streaming model has really cannibalized the industry itself. But the old contract did not really fit at hand glove. And so something had to give. And just the idea of artificial intelligence was something that didn't have any language in our contract, and we absolutely needed to have that conversation. And so the result of this seminal contract was that blank page. If the blank page of the blank page has been filled with new language to protect and compensate our member body upon which now we can begin building on this contract in the way that for the past 65 years, we've been dealing with the old contract.

Brad Levin [00:37:30] Yeah.

Fran Drescher [00:37:31] This has what is required to probably get us through a big chunk of this century.

Brad Levin [00:37:41] Well, that's an amazing accomplishment. And of course, there's been a lot of public attention on this, a lot of media and a lot of naysayers. What do you think is the one attribute that you used personally to help you reach this successful conclusion?

Fran Drescher [00:37:57] Well. I have to say that my Buddhist wisdom and my Buddhist philosophy really got me through this. I never applied it so much in the workplace as I did through this experience. And I think that it helped to hold my negotiating committee together. And I think that it helps create a perspective in the negotiating room with the CEOs that they weren't anticipating. But I didn't want to enter. Like they're my enemy. I want to. Underscore what the global importance of this negotiation is and where the responsibility that we all have to have in this time when artificial intelligence can easily run amok. Absolutely. If we're not careful.

Brad Levin [00:39:06] If we're not careful. Well, thank you for holding firm. And thank you for taking the time to spend this few minutes with me today. I really appreciate it, Fran.

Fran Drescher [00:39:16] Thank you. Thank you so much. I enjoyed talking to you. And I wish you and your beautiful wife good health and long life.

Brad Levin [00:39:25] Thank you so much. Well, folks, that is the extraordinary Fran Drescher. And you can learn more about Fran's ongoing quest by following her on Instagram at [@officialFranDrescher](#) and also at [@CancerSchmancer](#) and [@frandrescher](#) on X, formerly Twitter. And thank you to our sponsor, The Colony Group. The Colony Group is a national wealth and business management company with offices across the country that itself seeks the extraordinary as we pursue our unrelenting mission, providing our clients with peace of mind and empowering their visions of tomorrow. To learn more about The Colony Group and how we help our clients manage beyond money, visit [TheColonyGroup.com](#). You can also follow The Colony Group on LinkedIn and on X [@TheColonyGroup](#). For Seeking the Extraordinary. I'm Brad Levin and you can also follow me on LinkedIn and on X at [@BradALevin](#). Thank you and we'll be back soon.