Transcript for Episode 115: Interview with Daphne Palasi

Episode Duration: 41:50

JENN: Hello and welcome to the latest episode of the Minorities in Publishing podcast. For new and returning listeners, you may know you can find the podcast on Tumblr at minoritiesinpublishing.tumblr.com, or on Twitter @minoritiesinpub. And you can find it wherever you listen to podcasts, including Apple Podcasts, Spotify, TuneIn, IHeartRadio and Google Play.

And so, we're gonna have so many amazing authors on in the year of 2022. And I'm sending everyone the best energy because 2021 was *a lot* and I said that in 2020. 2022, it's gonna bring some chill-ass energy, I'm really, really hoping.

But what we're really here to celebrate is the debut author of the novel *Brown Girls,* coming out January 4th, so you know, you can start your year right: Daphne Palasi Andreades. Thank you for being here, Daphne!

DAPHNE: Thank you so much for having me, Jenn! This is such a treat. I love your podcast! And now I'm here! On it!

JENN: I know, I don't even know how much time that took. But here you are.

You finished a book, it is coming out. That is something to be hugely proud of in these weird, weird times we're in. And it's a beautiful, beautiful book, not just aesthetically, because it's very interesting. I have posted a few months ago, yours and Ivy, I believe *Angel and Hannah* that came out with One World which is also part of Random House. So your book is coming out from Random House proper. And they're both kind of pinkish. They had, like, these similar hues, and they both take place in Queens, which is my borough. So I'm all about Queens titles.

An imprint that is within my group at HarperCollins, they also have a book about brown girls and Queens. And I was like, do y'all know about Daphne's book? Because hers is coming out earlier in the year. So we should, like, make sure they all know each other. And just hang out and talk about Queens. I really hope there'll be some hardcore Queens representation in literature in the year 2022.

DAPHNE: I hope so as well! I'm so glad that you read the book, and you shared it. And were just so incredibly generous.

I wondered if you lived in Queens. I think I saw an Instagram photo of you standing in front of the Unisphere—

JENN: Oh, yeah, yeah, yeah, in the park.

DAPHNE: Yes, in Flushing Meadows Park. And I was like, oh my gosh, is Jenn just visiting or is she based in Queens? So anyways, so cool to learn that you also live in the borough!

JENN: Yes! And we're New Yorkers so I always appreciate New York stories. My two books–

DAPHNE: Woohoo!

JENN: –and my second book is also going to be in Queens. My first book takes place in Queens, but the second one Queens features way more prominently. Kind of like how yours does in *Brown Girls*, like when you talked about the boulevard of death and stuff. And I was like, yep, that's what it was called all through my high school years. The boulevard of death, the stats were really bad!

DAPHNE: Really, really bad.

JENN: We had that internal lingo.

So for the unawares, I don't even know if it's fair to, can you try to briefly summarize *Brown Girls*, if it's possible?

DAPHNE: Yeah, absolutely. My debut novel *Brown Girls* follows a group of young women of color who are primarily first and second generation immigrant daughters across different diasporas—which is really important to me—as they come of age in Queens, New York, around the 2000s. And basically, my novel traces their friendship through the arc of their lives, just as friends as, as daughters, as students, as parents. And it also follows some girls who choose to remain in the borough and the ones that leave and how their paths diverge in a sense. I guess lastly, I will say that the book is told through some unconventional choices. The first is that it's told through the 'we' point of view. So I call it, a chorus of women's voices that essentially narrates the book. It is also told using vignettes as the form for the novel.

JENN: Yeah, I wanted to get into that, because we don't really see that a lot. And by we I'm using that kind of a royal 'we' in terms of the quote-unquote traditional publishing space of how like, we have first person, we have third person, right? And then we have second person, which is used even more sparingly. And usually I see that mostly in short story collections. Like there'll always be that 'you', that one story in the collection that has the 'you' voice. And then I don't see the 'we' as much. Like I've seen it in, I think most people know, what is it, Joshua Ferris' *Then We Came to the End*, David Levithan's *Two Boys Kissing*, I believe, and they have a choir voice. And I've seen it in short stories as well. So it was very interesting to see.

And yours is a taut book, yours is not 500 pages or anything like that. I have it right in front of me, it is a little over 200 pages. And you're carrying these vignettes. And you're following several young women going into adulthood, like you say, and we're following all of them. And

sometimes they speak for themselves, but most time, they are that collective. So I'm very curious about how you saw *Brown Girls* developing. Was it always this format? Or was it a lot of trial and error for you?

DAPHNE: Yeah, that's such a great question. Oddly enough, in the past, I'd written short stories. I love that form. I love the economy of that form, and how precise you have to be with short stories. And usually when I revise, I sometimes try writing a story in first person or third person.

But when I started writing *Brown Girls*, it actually did start as a short story. And then it just morphed into, I called it, a novella. Then it grew into a novel because I was like, I guess I can't have an 80-page short story or like a hundred-something page novella. Anyway, that's all to say, when I started writing the piece in whatever early form it was, I started writing it immediately from this 'we' point of view. I didn't even bother trying first person or third person. It was like I was possessed or something. I felt like it could only be that voice, that particular point of view.

And I distinctly remember where I was. I was coming home. Oh, I was in my second year of grad school, and I was coming home from my fiction workshop and sitting on the N train home to Brooklyn. I actually haven't lived in Queens for the past seven years, I'd say. So anyway, yeah, at that point, I had been living in Brooklyn. And this was, I was a student back in 2017, 2018.

JENN: Oh, those are rough years. I wasn't too far. Because I worked at Teachers College.

DAPHNE: Oh my gosh, really?

JENN: Yeah.

DAPHNE: That's incredible. But I also think that using the 'we,' I think just came out of this place of really wanting to take a risk in my work and do something that felt different, that felt kind of fresh, that I hadn't really seen. So I guess the "we" is very, like I said, just unconventional, untraditional, but really the only voice for the story, I think.

JENN: It's interesting you say the word 'risk' there, too. Because if that's what's the most organic to the story, it's never really, to me, a risk. I can be a bit fly-by-night in my own way. Like, "Let's tell the story backwards! Let's see how that goes!" I don't know, might work, might not, whatevs!

But it's interesting. It's like, when we do, kind of, like, feed into what is right for the work, it's also sometimes about convincing people that that is what's right. And I'm speaking kind of both editorially and authorially in that way. So I don't know if you feel that way. But sometimes it's like, nah, this needs to be–I fight pretty hard sometimes for second person and people are like, no one likes second person! And I was like, don't tell me what they don't like! I'm like, this is what it is! It works, this is how it works.

DAPHNE: Yeah! And, and by works, I think it's like, specifically, what would be the most, I don't know, emotionally impactful, kind of striking, powerful. And I also think that the 'we' is a voice that fits this particular place of Queens, of a place that is incredibly, yeah, incredibly vibrant, and varied in just its diversity in every sense of the word. From ethnic diversity, linguistic diversity– it's the most, actually, the most diverse place in the entire world. So I guess I hope that the 'we' could somehow capture a little bit of that, of this, of this varied place.

JENN: Yeah. And I thought a lot about this, because, again, it is a short book. And there is a great economy of words here, that I think what you also did functionally, as an author, which I also think is just smart, is that, giving us so many characters, you are also kind of forced to constrain yourself in a way. And that's not limiting at all. It's just, well, this is what we need to focus on these characters. Because I know for me just as a reader, right, sometimes it's like, I really like this person and I don't love that person. Or I care more about this person. And that is subjective in and of itself, but that's also a kind of big juggling act an author has to do whenever they put in multiple perspectives. And by utilizing a 'we' it's kind of a way to get around that. And I don't know if people think about that.

[10:04]

And I'm not trying to say, work the system or whatever. But again, you said, this was the way this book had to be. And I feel like as a reader and as a person who is Black, or you know, like, technically Brown, that if you had wanted to really incorporate as many girls as you wanted to, it may not have worked as well. Or you would have had, like a very overloaded book, potentially. Because, well, I want six girls to be the focus. Or I want eight girls to be the focus. And that automatically inflates the book. And this allows you to really honor your voice.

DAPHNE: I love that. Yeah, I think that's really true.

JENN: So how did you visualize these young women? Because we do get to know them, and then their names pop up. And then after a while, and I think, again, this is hard to do, people–just because it's a little over 200 pages does not mean it's easy, those can be the hardest books to write!—is that after a while you don't even have to tell us who's talking, you know what I mean? Like, oh, I know who that is and I know that. But also, this is coming from me as someone who's from Queens, who grew up with people, with Guyanese, and Filipino and, you know, Indian and Pakistani, and Colombian, Ecuadorian. And so being in those households, there's very much already an immediate connective thread I had to this. So I'm reading it in a very different way than someone in Wisconsin will, obviously.

But I am curious, how did these characters come about? And how did you kind of, again, kind of make sure, okay, these are the characters. These are who we are following for the duration of this book. I don't know, some people, I mean, there's one character, I won't spoil it—let me not say anything more. But you know, like, I don't know if there were people dropped or added or like you said, this was a short story, then it was a novella. So I'm very curious of, did the cast

change while you're also figuring out the voice, of the structure and the best kind of format this book is coming into being?

DAPHNE: Right. Yeah. So the 'we,' I would say the 'we' was, even though it felt like the right choice for the story about women of color from different diasporas from Queens, it was still something that I definitely had to work on honing. Like I remember different graduate fiction workshops where I brought in excerpts of whatever I called it at the time, a short story or novella. I was like, I just have to hand in something. I'm going to call it something and I want to hand this in, and I want to hear people's feedback. And so a lot of the feedback was, I think, people almost wanted to pigeonhole it into having like, very, very specific characters, a very specific arc for these characters. And I mean, I think I was still trying to figure out the story at the time, too. So I mean, I took notes, and I really thought about what people said.

Later on, after school, I mean, after I was done with my program, and I started working on this manuscript with my editor, Marie Pantojan at Random House, who is also Filipino, though she grew up in Canada and I think Florida and North Carolina. That was one of her editorial questions as well. Like, who exactly is the 'we'? And I think that in our early editorial conversations, Marie was wondering if the 'we' was a tighter knit group of girls just based off of the manuscript that she had read, at this point, a year and a half ago, two years ago.

So yeah, I think all of these different experiences, especially working with Marie, really, really made me just really try to think about like, okay, who do I want this 'we' to be exactly. Like, how do I envision it? And so I really saw the 'we' as a wide, expansive, rather than a narrow cast of characters.

And there's this book that I read, I think I was maybe 18 years old when I read it, and it really influenced *Brown Girl*s. It's called *The Buddha in the Attic* by Julie Otsuka. And it was the first book that I read that used the 'we' in, in this way that I just thought was so deft and graceful in that, even though, like, Otsuka's book is also slim. And it follows a group of women who are Japanese mail-order brides, or essentially, in the early 20th century, traveling from Japan to San Francisco, as they're brides, as they become mothers. And I just read that book. It always stayed with me for the poetry and I'd just never seen or read anything like that. And I was just really impressed. It was a book that I returned to again and again when I was writing *Brown Girls* and just really trying to figure out the 'we,' how do I show this expansive cast of characters? But I really loved that her 'we' was so elastic, that she focused on the group of women, on the collective for, say, a paragraph or a page. Or sometimes one character comes up in one scene and, like, reappears in another. And sometimes other characters just, they just appear in one sentence. Their life is encapsulated in one deft, graceful sentence, and then you never hear from them again. And I just thought, wow, like her, 'we' can expand and contract.

And I really tried to study that book to write *Brown Girls*. And I think the technique that really helped me to try to figure out, to try to showcase this expansive cast of characters, was seeing that she would name, she would name just different women, like the women within this group. And then sometimes you would see their name crop up again, multiple times or never again. So

I think just on a technical craft level, I think that just really helped trying to showcase this ‘we’ for my book.

JENN: Yeah, I was just looking and I noticed that I had that on my Goodreads queue. And I was like, oh, snaps, alright, so I knew about it. I just had not gotten to that. So I will be reading Julie Osuka’s book at some point, I hope.

And it's so great that you also had a model for it. Because I feel like that's also so important about, you know—

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: —in this whole conversation about inclusivity, right? Also seeing the models, which is why I love poetry so much, because I feel like poetry can also dictate prose and vice versa in ways. And so I'm like, there's no limits to what you can do.

DAPHNE: Yeah!

JENN: You just kinda have to know your own rules, it feels like.

DAPHNE: Yes, definitely!

JENN: Can we talk about your editor? Because it sounds like that's a really great partnership that happened. And I'm curious how that relationship came to be. I don't know how deeply you want to go into this, about the submissions process and whatnot. I found that people are always very curious about it. Like, how did you get to the promised land, you know?

And you’re represented by Jin Auh, who was also very well known, very well respected, she represents so many great people, yourself included. And so it feels like there's kind of, something that's important to you, not just in terms of the whole gamut, right, of who understands my work? Who is there for the audience of my work? And how do these conversations go?

So in your opinion, maybe the more fair question is, how did you know that Jin and/or Marie were the right people to partner with for your book? Because these are partnerships. It isn't, like, I tell my agent what to do. My editor tells me what to do. Like, these are collaborative relationships that are hopefully longstanding.

DAPHNE: Absolutely! Oh, man, Jenn, I can't tell you! I can’t, I mean, I can tell you, I'm telling you now, and I'm sure you definitely understand, too. But it's just such a dream come true to get to work with an agent who is a woman of color, and an editor who's a woman of color. But not just because they're women of color. Because I just really love and respect and admire the work that they do. I mean, I'm smiling right now, but I—

JENN: I can hear it, I can hear you smile.

DAPHNE: I mean, I told my agent Jin, I was like, look, your clients, the authors that you represent changed my life, essentially. Because I would read these, these different authors: Jamel Brinkley, Alexia Arthurs, Alex Chee, who else? Ling Ma. So many other authors. And love their stories, love the work, and then like, read the acknowledgments and be, oh, they're represented by this agent whose name keeps cropping up: Jin Auh. Jin Auh, I need to put her on my dream list. So I mean, yeah, exactly as you were saying. It has always been so meaningful to have those, those models of other authors who are people of color, who are immigrants who are doing it. And to get to work with the professionals who are championing them and championing those stories. I'm just, I'm just so— am I dreaming? I think I'm dreaming.

JENN: Yeah, the trifecta! So that's huge!

DAPHNE: Yeah!

JENN: That's huge with the trifecta.

DAPHNE: Yes, yeah. And I mean, I'm not gonna beat around the bush or downplay it. I really did feel like there was a certain element of feeling like there's something I don't have to—I feel like as an author, as a woman of color, I don't have to explain to my agent or maybe more specifically, like, justify or like, clarify. And I mean, that's not to say an author shouldn't put in the work and figure out, like, how to pitch their book or see where their book stands in the so-called market, things like that.

[20:05]

But I don't know, I guess there was just a, an immediate like, I feel like I can trust this person. And I've seen it, for example, just from Jin's roster that she represents so many great writers. And I wouldn't feel like, oh, am I a token?

JENN: Right, right.

DAPHNE: Or am I just, like, being signed, because diversity is quote–unquote 'in' or something gross like that. She's been doing it all her career. And I don't know, Marie has been an editor for how many years now? Five years? So not as long in the game necessarily, but still just championing underrepresented and marginalized voices. And it's incredible to get to work with them.

JENN: I have to say, hearing you speak about that, too. I know for me, my agent is white. And I adore my agent because she's also, to me, one of those people who listens more than she speaks.

DAPHNE: So important.

JENN: Which I really appreciate from white people. And dudes.

DAPHNE: Ahh, so true!

JENN: And so she absorbs a lot. And she's always, kind of like, 'well, what do you want? What is your goal? What da do da.' And that, to me, really told me, you are someone who I can work with because you have a good reputation, but also, you're listening to me. You know what I mean?

DAPHNE: Yeah.

JENN: You're constantly asking me what my intentionality is before going into this kind of discourse, or you know, like, one-sided discussion, which I really appreciated. And I know that, like, when I spoke to her, when we went on sub with mine, I said, it's really important for me to prioritize the BIPOC editors first. And I don't think she wasn't prioritizing people. You know, it was like, oh, I'm gonna do this, I'm gonna do that. You know, I was like, let me say this so I don't have to say it. You know what I mean? So I don't have to be upset.

DAPHNE: Yeah.

JENN: Because I don't want to blame her for anything. If I didn't say I won't get it. Da da da da. This is therapy talking.

And Jin, I've heard because, again, she has a great reputation, is that she's very, very… She has a level of precision to her. So she's very, very pragmatic. And so maybe that's not a conversation you had to have with her, which is great, if you don't. And it's not bad if you do, I don't think. But it is great to hear that people just kind of know. And maybe when, you know, they're bringing on clients, they're just like, I think this would be the best person for you rather than doing the whole sweeping, let's submit to 30 people. And I get why people do that. I get why agents do that. I don't blame them. I'm not upset about it or anything. Because I think the main thing is making sure you as author end up with the best person to make your work the best it can be.

DAPHNE: Yes, that is so true. And I have to say, like, I feel like it's important to say I signed with Jin after I had finished my manuscript literally during the first wave of the pandemic. I finished it—

JENN: Get out! Really?

DAPHNE: Girl, yeah! Yeah, yeah.

JENN: What?! Props to you for even finishing. Wow, wow.

DAPHNE: Thank you! Thank you. And oh, my gosh, I really hope that does not come off as like, pat on the back, you know.

JENN: Not at all, I mean, you need that, right? This is your art. You worked hard for that.

DAPHNE: Yes. And it was like the one thing that kept me sane during the whole first wave of the pandemic, you know, March, April, May. Like at the time I was, I was teaching at a preschool where I had been part-time for four years, even through grad school and—

JENN: You were teaching at a preschool?!

DAPHNE: Before, before the pandemic hit.

JENN: Okay, I was like, good God Daphne! The babies! Oh, goodness.

DAPHNE: Yes, I know! So I was teaching and I was— I mean, I was doing a bunch of different things, but primarily teaching and waitressing, bartending.

And then the pandemic hit, and the city, New York City shut down, and I was furloughed. And my mom and my brother are nurses out in Queens, so I was freaking out for them, just calling them, checking in on them.

JENN: Oh my gosh, oh my gosh.

DAPHNE: During that first wave. Yeah, it was really, really difficult.

And I mean, thankfully, I had savings. I mean, my partner was still working at the time, but it was, I mean, that's all to say, it was just a really— Of course not just for me, but just a scary, uncertain time, especially. And so I wrote, I just kept writing. And I was like, this thing is keeping me sane. It's giving me structure. But part of me was also like, why? Why am I doing this thing? You know, like, it feels like the world is burning. And then the BLM protests happened, those awful murders happened in June, and it was extremely difficult.

I mean, that's kind of where the book was born. I finished a draft that I was proud of that I sent to friends that summer. And I mean, I was like, yes, this is, this has always been a goal to, like, finish this book, write this book. I just never thought it would happen, of course, during this like global plague.

As a debut writer, at that time, in summer of 2020, I was unagented. I didn't have a publisher, no one was waiting for the book. And that's difficult, too. But I mean, I finished it. I signed with my agent that summer. And then in the Fall of September 2020, we sent it out to, I think, we sent it out to 15 editors at different houses. And it was just like: rejection, rejection, rejection, I think 12 rejections, and I was like, ‘oh, no, oh, no, my baby!’ Maybe it needs more work, I'm not sure!

But I just mentioned that part about like, all of the rejections, the 12 rejections. And then interestingly enough, three editors who were women of color were the ones who got back to Jin and I, and were like this, this book, I love this book. And we want to make offers on this book. And that changed everything. I mean, so part of me wonders if the book would even exist if it wasn't for those editors who were women of color, those gatekeepers. So I just can't believe it. I'm really happy for how everything turned out. And it's just been such a joy to work with Marie, to work with someone who really wants to champion the book. And that's all I can ask for.

JENN: Wow! That's an emotional roller coaster, Daphne!

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: What? Right? Just like, agented, ooh… Wait, we sold it, yay! Election time, oh God.

DAPHNE: Yeah.

JENN: I'm so glad it just found the right person. And obviously from the way you talk about Marie too, it just seems like she was just the one. And sometimes that's just what it is. It's just like anything: you're the one. And this is kind of quick, too. You're selling it, like, in the Fall, and then it's coming out early 2022. So that's kind of a fast track.

DAPHNE: Yes! I am not really sure what was happening behind the scenes, but, with different seasons, but— the book is actually coming out two days before my birthday. So I'm just ecstatic.

JENN: Whoa! That's gonna be a huge week!

DAPHNE: Yeah!

JENN: New Year. Book pub. Birthday. What?!

DAPHNE: Yes!

JENN: My Gosh. That's just, wow, that's super. I'm pumped! I was born three weeks after that. So like I'm gonna be, I'm gonna have a lot of pubs to celebrate on my birthday. Not mine, which I actually, I'm happy about. I don't want to share my birthday with my book. Gonna be like, it's all about me, right?

DAPHNE: That's fair, that's fair.

JENN: But that's like cool to have a birthday on a Tuesday and be like, oh my God, so-and-so's book came out, this is great.

DAPHNE: [Laughs]

JENN: I hope there'll be a lot of local and national celebrations and all that good stuff.

DAPHNE: Yes! I hope so. I hope so, too.

JENN: So my next question, again, if you're open to talking about it, if you're open to talking about the MFA. Because that is a huge part of, you know, you're on Twitter too, the discourse, right? Of, to MFA or not to MFA? And all of our experiences are different. And that doesn't dispute anyone's own individual experiences or the larger issues within this country that obviously seep into corporate world, academic world, etcetera, etcetera.

I went to my MFA in New York City years ago, in the early aughts, and I did not have a great experience in it. And that was more due to my cohort than anything else. And I'm not saying they're bad people, I usually say that they were not serious. That was my particular experience, was that a lot of the people who were in my workshops were not reading our work, were not able to give critique in any real fashion. Some people were really great at it, and some people weren't. And like those numbers when you're in those classes and paying alone… You know, and you're just like, I actually need help to be a better writer? And this is not helping things personally.

I just kept going to writing workshops, and I read a lot. I read everything. I still read everything. People know I love poetry. Poetry inspires me a lot about how to approach prose. But I just kept going to, like, if I was able to get a residency, God bless them, I would go on a residency. But I was constantly going to workshops. You know, I was taking time off work to go to workshops. I was using PTO to go–

[30:03]

DAPHNE: Wow!

JENN: —to Maine, to go to, like California or Arizona, or wherever to just get into a writing workshop, to get, like, that feedback that I needed and make those connections. So that's something that I got.

I think the workshop experience is really important, even though it can be toxic. But I don't necessarily think the MFA environment, again, in my opinion, is a necessity. And so, I don't necessarily want to bring up anything that was really upsetting for you. But I am curious as to like, how did you learn and how did you become a developed voice and everything?

Because we're constantly developing, right? It's not like, I published a book, I'm good now. Every book is hard. Daphne and I are on our second books that are under contract. Those are hard, people! When you're in a contract, I've said it on Twitter, writing is different when you're under contract! You have no idea what's going to happen, you're like, I'm free to do whatever, but I'm

still anxious. But then when you're under contract, you're like, alright, so we got some serious deadlines?

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: Cool! Not used to this.

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: So how do you feel, like, whether it's the MFA or outside, because I know you did residencies and other things too. Like, how do you feel those areas helped you? Or maybe didn't help you? And I feel like even when we may not have a great experience, we still learned something.

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: That's just me. I don't want to project that onto people. Like, you can still, if it sucked, it sucked. But I tried to take that and be like, okay, I learned something from that.

DAPHNE: Mmm hmm. So the MFA experience for me, I also did my MFA in New York City. I graduated in 2019. And, but it was, I'm not gonna lie. It was a really tough experience. I mean, I had gone to public schools, New York City public schools, all my life, from kindergarten, even through undergrad. I attended CUNY, which is a City University in New York. So I started my MFA at Columbia. I was like, oh, my gosh, this is a dream come true. And then I got there. My first year, it was so jarring, it was so jarring for me. And I felt so out of place in so many ways. And I feel like I only feel comfortable sharing that because you were just sharing with me about how your MFA experience was also challenging in some ways.

But yeah, I mean, Columbia's program is, your students are funded basically anywhere from zero to 60%. And it really varies. And yeah, if you're, I don't want to say if you're lucky, but like, if you are, I don't know, bright enough or whatever, there are a handful of paid teaching positions that pay for everything in your second year. I think it created a very strange environment for me, I think just…

Well, first of all, it was difficult in a lot of ways because I wish that, honestly, I wish that we had read more authors of color. I feel like we did sometimes in class, but they were like, the awesome, of course, heavy hitters, like classics. But nothing really beyond that.

JENN: So like Toni Morrison.

DAPHNE: Yes!

JENN: And James Baldwin.

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: And maybe Ha Jin, I don't know. They won a Pulitzer, they're on it.

DAPHNE: Exactly. Exactly. Zadie Smith. I love Zadie Smith. Yeah. So, I wish we had read more authors of color. I wish that it was a program that had more faculty of color. And these are all, of course, these like, structural, systemic issues. It's not down to one individual. It's these structural things.

And so that was my first year of the MFA experience. And that was also the year that Trump got elected. And so there was just this, for me, this overwhelming feeling of, just like, I felt like my soul was being crushed. I mean, I just felt so alienated. And there were maybe ten other students of color and a fiction class of 75. It's a really big program. And so I don't know, it just, I think all of that weighed on me. And I was just like, what am I doing here? Like, I'm not white. I'm not wealthy like my classmates. I'm working these different jobs.

I had a classmate who asked me in my first year, she was like, oh, what are you doing for winter break? I'm going to Greece. And I was like, I'm so happy because I have this month to like, take extra shifts at my job. And she was just so mortified! I just remember that.

JENN: Wow!

DAPHNE: It was tough! I felt totally out of place.

JENN: And I know it happens. But it's just kind of like, no, wait, that happens? You know what I mean? Where you're just like… people are like that?

DAPHNE: Yeah, so it was tough. But I really thought, this is an expensive program in New York City. There's a big literary scene here, do I need to stay in my MFA program? And I really took that summer after my first year to think about if I want to stay, if it was the right choice.

And at the end of the summer, I was essentially like, I think that there are a lot of fears and anxieties that I also have. I mean, I come from, I just came from a very, very different background. I mean, there weren't a lot of other people of color, immigrant students from, kind of, lower middle-class backgrounds in that program. And I think, I don't know, it just took a lot, I guess, to push that aside, or try to look beyond that. And I'm just grateful to my partner, to my friends, my family, who, even if they didn't totally understand this writing thing I was doing I think, they still supported me. And I remember thinking there are so many people who are rooting for me to finish this program, to come out of this program with stories with readers, workshop leaders to stay in touch with. People are rooting for me, people are supporting me, and I can do this.

So thankfully, the second year was a lot better than the first year, I really think that. I found more of my people, POC and white, and just better mentors. I studied with Elissa Schappell,

who is an author, she also co-founded *Tin House*. I studied with Paul Beatty, who was my very last graduate fiction workshop professor, and both of them just totally kicked me in the butt and set very high expectations and demanded the best, I think, of me and my work. And that was what I needed, I think. All of those things.

JENN: I'm so glad to hear that, that you found the community. Because I think, again, this is, a lot of us recognize that writing, for the most part, is such a solo experience, but it really requires community.

DAPHNE: Yep.

JENN: Like, you can write for 20 hours, a day, a week, whatever. But at the end of the day, you need that kind of interface to say, oh, this makes sense. Or I don't understand or here's, like, another way to look at things. Or here's something to broaden the horizons, so to speak. So it's really gratifying to hear when people do find those communities, and then continue to find those communities outside of those environments, whether those environments worked or did not work out for them.

And it takes how long it takes for some people. It won't always happen after grad school. It may happen *years*—I'm holding my hand up—*years* after grad school for you to just get to that place. And I'm just like, alright, I know who I am a bit better now.

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: I also really give shouts to therapy for me. I know, I think everyone needs therapy. I've said this on an episode previously, but I really give shouts to my therapist for helping me.

DAPHNE: I love that.

JENN: Right? And I was just like, oh it makes me think about psychology a lot more than I ever did before.

DAPHNE: Yes!

JENN: Yeah. Daphne, this has been an absolute pleasure to talk to you.

DAPHNE: Thank you so much, Jenn! I feel exactly the same way. This has been so cool.

JENN: So how can people get in touch with you, make sure to follow, because you're going to be having events, and we want to make sure people can, like, click the follow, click the like.

DAPHNE: Yes!

JENN: More importantly, click the pre-order.

DAPHNE: Yes!

JENN: If you want, order, order. So you are on the social media?

DAPHNE: I am on the social media, yes. You can find me on my website, which is my name at www.daphnepalasiandreades.com I'm also on Instagram and Twitter @DaphnePalasiA.

JENN: And that's all one word?

DAPHNE: Yes. All one word.

JENN: Okay, so that's DAPHNE PALASI ANDREADES, your full name, dot COM.

DAPHNE: Yes, that is right.

JENN: Yay!

DAPHNE: Thank you so much, Jenn! This was really, really fun.

JENN: Oh, thank you! I always appreciate when people want to have a conversation so it is my pleasure and it is really my honor.

And *Brown Girls* y'all– January 4 2022.

DAPHNE: Woohoo.

JENN: So, by the time you hear this episode, you can have it in your homes. So I feel like it's a win-win situation. Like, hear Daphne and then you could read the book, right before or after—

DAPHNE: Yes.

JENN: —you hear Daphne talk about her experiences.

DAPHNE: Yay, read it friends!

JENN: Yes, out from Random House, great imprint with so many great people, including your editor, Marie.

[40:02]

Again, Daphne, I'm just so happy for you, I'm happy for this book. You've written something so loving for our communities. And I can't wait for people to teach it. You know, people are gonna find your book now and know it's possible.

DAPHNE: Oh my gosh, I am already mind blown at just thinking about that!

JENN: Think about going to Columbia and then just being like, heyyyy! Leaving it in some people's offices.

DAPHNE: Walking away, just dropping it and walking away.

JENN: Literally like a mic drop.

DAPHNE: Drop.

JENN: Just have Random House send them a copy. Like, hey, look what I did.

DAPHNE: This was born, okay? This happened. Yes. [Laughs]

JENN: ***Brown Girls*** by Daphne Palasi Andreades out January 4th. January's the best month.

DAPHNE: Birthday month! Whoo! Capricorn month.

JENN: Oh Capricorn. Yep, January 6 is Daphne's birthday, so please. Also buy the book for Daphne's birthday. I feel like this is also good promotion. Just do like a birthday read-in. That's my recommendation. No pressure.

DAPHNE: I love it. Thank you, Jenn, thank you so much for the work that you do. This is just incredible for all of us on the other end of the podcast and panels and everything. So thank you!

JENN: Aww, thank you. Again, my honor.

And thank you all for listening. And Happy New Year! I really hope people are having a joyous and lovely and safe 2022 already. Thank you for listening.

Thank you again, Daphne.

DAPHNE: Thank you!

[41:50]